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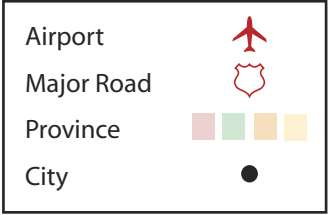
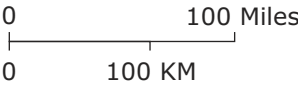
VERITAS

Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

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ARSOF NAMES AND FACES

Pseudonyms used throughout the magazine are to protect the identities of ARSOF personnel. When actual names are used, they are either in the public domain or permission was granted to use them. When the entire face of a soldier is visible, then the eyes are blurred (pixilated) to protect the soldier's identity.

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Factors Affecting ARSOF Preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom

by Charles H. Briscoe

THE Army special operations forces (ARSOF) missions and supporting roles during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) are best understood in context of the U.S.'s prior commitments to combating terrorism worldwide. After the major terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC on 11 September 2001, President George W. Bush declared a Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).¹

Intelligence sources revealed that the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America had been organized, funded, and directed by Osama bin Laden, the leader of the international terrorist organization al-Qaeda. When the radical Muslim Taliban government of Afghanistan refused to surrender bin Laden, to whom they had granted asylum, the collapse of that regime and destruction of al-Qaeda forces therein became the mission of U.S.-led coalition military forces. Army special operations forces began offensive operations in Afghanistan in November 2001, launching America's first GWOT campaign: Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF).

While U.S. military efforts primarily focused on Afghanistan, other regional combatant commands found themselves involved in GWOT operations. Fifth Special Forces Group (SFG) led Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF)-North (Task Force

Dagger) in prosecuting OEF in Afghanistan for U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). U.S. European Command (EUCOM), already committed with NATO in the Balkans, focused on the "Horn of Africa" Muslim countries, and ongoing operations in Bosnia and Kosovo.

The U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) concentrated on the criminal/terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which was responsible for multiple kidnappings for ransom of

U.S. citizens in the Philippines. ASG terrorist activities were linked to Libyan leader Mu'ammar Qaddafi, as well as to Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, the leader of which was Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law.

In response to the ASG terrorist threat, PACOM significantly expanded Exercise Balikatan

When the radical Muslim Taliban government of Afghanistan refused to surrender bin Laden, the collapse of that regime and destruction of al-Qaeda forces therein became the mission of U.S.-led coalition military forces.

02. First SFG assumed major training and advisory roles, helping the Philippine military combat the ASG on Basilan Island and rescue the Burnhams on Mindanao.² A joint U.S. Navy-Marine Corps Engineer Task Group also supported Humanitarian/Security Assistance (H/SA) programs in the conflicted areas.³

By the time these events played out in the Philippines, CJSOTF-North, led by 5th SFG teams and lacking conventional forces, had helped bring about the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Estab-

Establishing an interim authority to maintain order and to govern Afghanistan during the reconstruction period became the U.S. government's priority.

lishing an interim Afghanistan authority to maintain order and to govern the country during the reconstruction period became the U.S. government's priority.

In spite of these commitments in Afghanistan and around the world, Army planners looked ahead and developed plans to deal with other possible threats. Well before President Bush declared the end of combat operations in Afghanistan, CENTCOM and Special Operations Command-Central Command (SOCCENT) had already begun planning in Tampa, Florida, for offensive operations to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.⁴

CENTCOM's primary war plan since the 1991 Gulf War was named Operations Plan (OPLAN) 1003. OPLAN 1003 was essentially Operation DESERT STORM II, and called for a combined U.S. defense of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia against an Iraqi attack. Since OPLAN 1003 had not been updated since 1998, CENTCOM planners worked several variants allowing the commanding general flexibility.⁵

The final "variant" of the OPLAN, 1003V (pronounced "Ten-O-Three Victor" by the military) was a "middle-of-the road" option, between the original 1003 Generated Start and the "flow-and-go" football play of Running Start. Sufficient combat power would be pre-positioned forward to fulfill the plan's objectives. Then, as forward staging areas emptied, more conventional forces would flow in to "backstop" initial force packages. Even as the OPLAN underwent debate and revision, the SOF role remained consistent.⁶

Initial SOCCENT planning was quite rudimentary because, in accordance with a strict security regimen, only OPLAN 1003 force-listed elements were invited to send unit planners. The CENTCOM-oriented 5th SFG played a significant role in OPLAN 1003, but the conventional Army headquarters assuming command of Afghanistan was reluctant to release ARSOF forces. Third SFG was released from its EUCOM "Horn of Africa" mission in

order to relieve 5th SFG in Afghanistan, thereby freeing 5th SFG to assume the Iraq mission. Third SFG assumed the Afghanistan mission as the unconventional warfare (UW) campaign in Afghanistan was replaced by a counterinsurgency mission against remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda elements and their key leaders who escaped capture or death, namely Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden. The 5th SFG left equipment for 3rd SFG to use, including organic military and captured civilian vehicles, as well as mounted heavy weapon systems.

With significant ARSOF elements committed to Afghanistan, the Philippines, and the Balkans, and another war looming on the horizon, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), the Department of

Vehicles, aircraft, and heavy weapons had to be replaced; equipment refurbished; critical maintenance checks accomplished; mission support adjusted to the realities of current operations; and personnel shortfalls corrected.

the Army, the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR), the National Guard Bureau and several state Adjutants General over SOF Army National Guard (ARNG) units faced major resourcing challenges. Money could not solve all the equipment, munitions, and personnel problems in the time allotted to prepare for the next war. The industrial war base of America had severely eroded since Operation DESERT STORM in 1991, and weak commercial competition for individual high-tech combat equipment (night vision goggles, secure radios, satellite communications, body armor) critical to SOF personnel further delayed deliveries to military units. U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) controls on satellite friendly force trackers, and limited access to U.S. classified materials and secure

With significant ARSOF elements committed to Afghanistan, the Philippines, and the Balkans, and another war looming on the horizon, the U.S. faced major resourcing challenges.

computer systems further complicated arrangements for allied support. All the above were across-the-board needs based on active Army, USAR, and ARNG support

OEF revealed the true readiness of USAR and ARNG units, and a grossly antiquated mobilization system.

to Afghanistan, the Philippines, and potentially Iraq.

In order to provide adequate ARSOF support to current and future campaigns, vehicles, aircraft, and heavy weapons had to be replaced; equipment refurbished; critical maintenance checks accomplished; mission support adjusted to the realities of current operations; and personnel shortfalls corrected. The task of preparing 5th SFG alone for the next fight was tremendous. “The 5th had to ‘recock’ for 1003V,” stated 5th SFG’s commander, Colonel (COL) John Mulholland.⁷ Specifically, 5th SFG had to be refitted with vehicles and heavy weapons.

On the command level, the harsh weather and environment of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan had significantly reduced the life span of 5th SFG’s computer systems, and its radios needed extensive maintenance. Adding to the supply challenge, environmental and combat losses of MH-47E helicopters in Afghanistan and the Philippines required these vital ARSOF air assets to be micromanaged. “The 5th Group refit costs—amounting to almost \$300 million—caused USSOCOM to do major funding reprioritization. Time became an enemy. New equipment—radios as well as computers, weapons, and vehicles—were procured and fielded to allow the 5th SFG soldiers to train before being deployed into combat again. Thus, the money flow—slow or fast—impacted readiness for combat,” stated COL Patrick Higgins, J3, SOCCENT.⁸

Highly trained personnel are the most important assets in Army SOF, and the deficit in their availability could not be offset by Army “Stop-Loss” declarations, major recruiting efforts, and shortened programs of instruction (POI). This proved especially true for Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) training for Army Reservists. OEF revealed the true readiness of USAR and ARNG units, and a grossly antiquated mobilization system. The two-year mobilizations of Army Reserve and National Guard personnel

and units to support ARSOF in OEF-Afghanistan had been plagued with problems. OEF had placed serious demands on ARNG Special Forces, and USAR Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations units whose operational readiness standard—personnel and equipment—had been maintained at peacetime levels for almost thirty years. In addition, by the time planning for OIF began, those activated personnel and units were entering their second year of mobilization.

The mobilization situation highlighted the fact that Joint Manning Documents (JMDs), which provide the lifeblood for combatant commands, their special operations commands, and subsequent joint special operations task forces (JSOTFs), needed to be rejuvenated. The warfighting SOCCENT headquarters staff was more than 80 percent manned by Reservists from all Department of Defense (DoD) services. The pattern for assigning personnel had been set by OEF—the higher headquarters working the JMDs were filled before the field JSOTFs—which meant that field headquarters for OIF were left needing vital manpower.

In spite of the personnel challenges, the JSOTFs saw improvement over their experiences in Afghanistan. This time coalition forces would provide staff officers to the JSOTFs, making them truly combined (CJSOTFs). The dysfunctional coalition alignment in Task Force K-Bar (CJSOTF-South) during OEF and the subsequent *ad hoc* fixes made by COL Mark Phelan

The major demand for arms and munitions had been supplied by non-Department of Defense (DoD) agencies using foreign weapons and munitions. This type of solution would not work for any campaign against Iraq.

for CJSOTF-Afghanistan were addressed. The JMDs included coalition personnel in key staff positions. COL Mulholland had a British lieutenant colonel as his J3 (operations officer) and an Australian colonel as his deputy. The British and Australian military filled all of their assigned billets with top quality personnel.⁹

Relatively unnoticed during OEF was the state

of America's industrial capability for warfighting. The major demand for arms and munitions—to support Afghan warlord armies—had been supplied by non-Department of Defense (DoD) agencies using foreign weapons and munitions. This type of solution would not work for any campaign against Iraq, which would involve tens of thousands of U.S. troops. Only Operation ANACONDA in the post-combat operations phase had stressed the DoD materiel system, and that was short-lived. Ammunition for training requirements in the Philippines and Colombia were delayed, but eventually supplied. Elation at the rapid collapse of the Taliban in Afghanistan masked these basic logistical problems from planners considering their options for future military missions.

The victory-induced euphoria also led many government officials and military leaders to ignore changing governmental attitudes in the cooperative countries of the Middle East, Europe, and Asia regarding America's GWOT. As Washington officials sought United Nations support for a coalition effort against Iraq for possessing weapons of mass destruction, only Great Britain, Poland, and Australia committed coalition military forces to the U.S.-led effort. The reluctance of

neighboring countries to become involved in expanded military operations against terrorism made it more difficult for the U.S. military to forward-base troops in theater. Basing rights, military overflights, temporary staging airfields, and border crossing sites all became hot issues. As various countries denied access, CENTCOM and EUCOM and their respective special operations command (SOCCENT and SOCEUR) planners had to begin developing contingencies for contingencies. It was this final phase of planning that led the two regional combatant commands to end up in competing roles.

Several complicating factors were linked to unspecified command relationships between CENTCOM and EUCOM at the tactical level, and changing attitudes in the world. The European Command would have to live with Turkey after the war, while CENTCOM would not. Thus, two different attitudes developed. Expectations as to what Turkey would support—politically

and militarily—proved unrealistic and non-supportable; i.e., access to and the capacity of eastern Turkey Lines of Communications to handle conventional armored forces. The competition between combatant commands to “get in the fight” plagued planners at multiple levels and further complicated resourcing.

While Iraq was clearly in the CENTCOM area of operations (AOR), key staging areas for the northern campaign—first Turkey, and subsequently, Romania—were in the EUCOM AOR. Since Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld never specified that CENTCOM would be the *supported* combatant command and EUCOM would be *supporting* combatant command, the European Command continued to compete for resources and appropriate combat missions for its forces. Meanwhile, SOCCENT had decided early on that the SOF campaign would be prosecuted by two CJSOTFs: one responsible for northern Iraq and Kurdish forces, and a second for SCUD missile suppression and organizing of

Shia resistance in the western and southern deserts of Iraq. The primary focus of the CENTCOM conventional force was Baghdad, which naturally led SOCCENT to further concentrate on the SCUD and resistance missions in the west and south. When EUCOM-dedicated

The victory-induced euphoria also led many to ignore changing governmental attitudes in the cooperative countries of the Middle East, Europe, and Asia regarding America's GWOT.

forces joined the fight in the north, command and control of the northern SOF campaign surfaced as an issue.

ARSOF's participation in OIF took place in context of commitments to OEF in Afghanistan, and to ongoing operations and training in the Philippines, Kosovo, and Colombia. Continued responsibility for the CJSOTF in Afghanistan meant rotating an SFG headquarters and SF battalions every six months to support the conventional task force. Having left its vehicles and heavy weapons in Afghanistan for that mission, 5th SFG had to undergo a refit of Ground Mobility Vehicles (GMVs) and weapons while its communications and computer equipment underwent extensive maintenance and refurbishing. With the ARNG SFGs picking up more ARSOF missions, they, too, had to be equipped with compatible communications, computer systems, armored GMVs, and crew-served weapons. The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) had major aircraft

Since it was never specified that CENTCOM would be the supported combatant command with EUCOM as supporting combatant command, the European Command continued to compete for resources.

inspections and scheduled maintenance to perform while still supporting ARSOF operations in Afghanistan and the Philippines. MH-47Es lost in Afghanistan and the Philippines had to be replaced, and other aircraft repaired. Availability of training ammunition affected U.S. support in the Philippines and Colombia, as well as necessary training for future overseas combat missions. All these factors affected USASOC's ability to fulfill mission requirements for other supported commands.

First SFG headquarters and an SF battalion were charged with the Joint Task Force (JTF)-510 mission in the Philippines, while 10th SFG had an element in Kosovo, and 7th SFG continued to provide an SF battalion to Colombia. Reserve personnel for new JMDs became scarce in the midst of continuing GWOT requirements for USSOCOM, CENTCOM, SOCCENT, USASOC, US Army Special Forces Command (USASFC), US Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (USACAPOC), CJSOTF-Afghanistan, and JTF-510. The pool of mobilized PSYOP and CA battalions had been heavily tapped for Afghanistan, yet many of these same units were force-listed for OPLAN 1003.

Allies to support a U.S.-led war against Iraq as part of GWOT had also become hard to find. As the primary warfighter, CENTCOM had priority for individual and unit mobilizations, but the DoD mobilization system was very antiquated. Even when the soldiers were taken care of, their families often suffered since family benefits for the federalized Army Reserve and National Guard were not yet fully worked out and applied. The realities of operational readiness and historical maintenance of USAR and ARNG units at Authorized Levels of Organization (ALO) 2 and 3 caused commanders to fill requirements for battalion units from all available assets. From stateside mobilization to field CJSOTFs, personnel problems continued to worsen.

ARSOF planners had to take into account USASOC's GWOT commitments around the world as they assigned units and filled JMDs. DoD-wide resource constraints also affected planning and mission fulfill-

ment. Lack of direction led to competition between EUCOM and CENTCOM for valuable equipment, personnel, and even TPFDD (Time Phased Force Deployment Document) slots. OPLAN 1003V called for 5th SFG's involvement, which required it to regroup and refit on the heels of its OEF activities in Afghanistan. All these factors, and more, provided the context in which ARSOF planned and played out its missions and roles during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. He earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina, and is a retired Army special operations officer. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, in El Salvador, and Colombia.

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- 9 Mulholland interview.

ARSOF's participation in OIF took place in context of commitments to Afghanistan, the Philippines, Kosovo, and Colombia. Continued responsibility for the CJSOTF in Afghanistan meant rotating an SFG headquarters and SF battalions every six months to support the conventional task force.

“Alarm Red!”

Providing Signal Support in Kuwait



Ali al Salem Air Base

by Cherilyn A. Walley and Yul C. Yurcaba

PFC Miller heard the words “Alarm Red! Alarm Red!” echo across the base, and realized this was no drill.

THE sound of the warning siren had become almost commonplace to the 112th Signal Battalion soldiers stationed at Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait in the first few months of 2003. It was always followed by an announcement indicating that the following alarm was only an exercise, and then the alarm itself. Though soldiers dutifully donned their MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) gear each time the alarm sounded, familiarity was definitely breeding contempt, and enthusiasm for the drills was waning fast.

The air base had four levels of alarm status, ranging from green to black, each indicating the magnitude of the threat. The alarm level also dictated whether or not personnel had to dress in their MOPP suits or merely keep the gear close by. The highest level of pre-attack alert was Alarm Red, indicating that a missile attack was imminent or in progress and all personnel were to assume MOPP IV status—wear all protective gear. Alarm Yellow indicated that an attack was probably in less than thirty minutes and put everybody at MOPP II, where some gear was worn and the rest carried. The primary status of the air base was Alarm Green, normal wartime conditions, which only required that people keep their MOPP gear on hand at all times. In order to keep everybody in practice, Alarm Red exercises were conducted with numbing regularity.

Thus was the situation and mindset of the

112th Signal soldiers when in the early days of Operation Iraqi Freedom they once again heard the Alarm Red siren. At first, Private First Class (PFC) Betsy Miller thought it was another drill and waited for the inevitable “Exercise” announcement. Instead, she only heard the words “Alarm Red! Alarm Red!” echo across the base, and realized this was no drill—the base was under attack.¹

PFC Miller stepped outside her tent to assess the situation and found “people going everywhere. There [was] no organization to it.” Some were racing to take shelter in bunkers, while others were scrambling back to their tents for their MOPP suits. Miller even witnessed people colliding at intersections. The confusion was heightened by the fact that some personnel on the base had taken to ignoring the drills and were therefore all the more excited by the actual alarm. In the excitement, Staff Sergeant Devon Danner’s mask was initially picked up by a frantic airman; fortunately, it was returned by the time Danner had ushered his people out of the communications room and was ready to head to a bunker. In contrast, Miller noticed that the Special Forces soldiers were calmly doing what they needed to do, seemingly unphased by the chaos around them.²

Taking cover was almost as strenuous as the attack itself. PFC Miller and her supervisor Sergeant Ben Parker crowded into an upstairs room surrounded by three-foot thick concrete walls, their

designated bunker. To everybody's discomfort, the bunker was full of people—"It was packed." To make matters worse, the day was hot. With everybody wearing their unventilated MOPP suits in such heat and proximity, the floor became "literally wet" with sweat. Each Alarm Red kept people at MOPP IV and in bunkers for at least thirty minutes.

Reinforcing the knowledge that the war had come to Ali Al Salem, the alarms continued off and on for the next two days, even rising from Alarm Red to Alarm Black at one point, indicating a missile had struck close by. To drive the point home, the soldiers could hear Patriot Missiles launch to intercept incoming missiles. The alarm was often closely followed by the "Boom! Boom!" that indicated a battery had been fired.³

Eventually the danger passed and the alarms subsided, bringing Ali Al Salem Air Base back to Alarm Green and "normal" war-time conditions. The soldiers of Charlie Company, 112th Signal Battalion continued to fulfill their communications mission in Kuwait until they were redeployed to Baghdad in May 2003. The job they did in Kuwait was a familiar one, but the sound of "Alarm Red! Alarm Red!" made the mission memorable for the 112th. 🔴

Cherilyn A. Walley has been a historian with the USASOC History Office since 2003. She received her PhD from Iowa State University. Current research projects include special operations units in the China-Burma-India theater during World War II, including Merrill's Marauders and Mars Task Force.

Yul Yurcaba is a Chief Warrant Officer 4 with G3, USASOC Headquarters. He formerly served with 5th Special Forces Group.

Endnotes

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- 2 Ibid.; Interview with Staff Sergeant Devon Danner by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Yul C. Yurcaba, 30 June 2003, Baghdad, Iraq, notes and recording in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
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WANTED

OIF PHOTOS

The photographs and maps in this issue of *Veritas* are a few of the best we could find. The History Office invites anyone with photos from OIF—digital or print—to bring or send them in. We will copy and file any photos we receive and will use them throughout the book *All Roads Lead to Baghdad: ARSOF in Iraq*, coming out this summer. We would like photos from all ARSOF components.

If you have maps or suggestions for enhancing these maps, please let us know so that we can accurately portray ARSOF history.

If you wish to submit photos and/or maps for other ARSOF endeavors, we would appreciate those as well.

For your future picture-taking activities, please use the highest resolution possible on your digital cameras to ensure excellent print quality for book and magazine publications.

Getting There is Half the Battle:

Operation UGLY BABY

by Robert W. Jones, Jr.



News that Turkey would not allow U.S. forces to pass through its territory was a surprise, but to the soldiers of the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG), it was a near disaster.

PREPARATION for what would become Operation IRAQI FREEDOM began months before the start of hostilities on 19 March 2003. News that Turkey would not allow U.S. forces to pass through its territory was a surprise, but to the soldiers of the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG), it was a near disaster. Months of contingency planning had been conducted, and equipment had been painstakingly prepositioned at an Intermediate Support Base (ISB) in Turkey. The soldiers of 10th SFG would truly show their mettle by adjusting plans and executing operations in an extremely austere and flexible environment.

As with many operations, the first task of the 10th SFG staff was to get soldiers on the ground in order to show commitment. Based on their experiences in 1991 during the Gulf War, the Kurds were hesitant at first to commit to a U.S. effort to oust Saddam. A primary responsibility of Special Forces (SF) was to show the Kurdish leadership and the rank and file that the U.S. was serious and committed to combat. The only way to show U.S. resolve was to get SF soldiers on the ground and conducting combat operations with the Kurdish *Peshmerga* units. This meant getting as many Operational Detachments A (ODAs), the basic combat unit of the Special Forces, into northern Iraq as quickly as possible.¹ To that end, an SF company (-)

organized as an Advanced Operating Base (AOB) successfully infiltrated from their prepositioning location into the northern sector and made initial coordination with the Kurdish resistance organizations.²

Turkey's 1 March refusal to allow overflight to coalition aircraft prevented the rest of 10th SFG from infiltrating across the Turkey-Iraq border as planned. With driving across the border no longer an option, 10th SFG conducted air planning with the 352nd Special Operations Wing. Time was quickly running out on the carefully developed unconventional warfare plan. In the meantime, on 3 March the 10th SFG forward deployed to Constanta, Romania, in an effort to stay relatively close to the Joint Special Operations Area (JSOA). The Turkish decision to block coalition access increased the infiltration distance fourfold, from 250 miles to over 1,000 miles. For several days the State Department attempted to gain overflight permission from the Turkish government, but to no avail. As the 10th SFG staff adjusted the overall plan, logistics soldiers worked with the ODAs and aircrews to load MC-130s for infiltrations ultimately cancelled because of the overflight refusal. A bold decisive move had to be made or the U.S. would run the risk of losing Kurdish support on the northern front, freeing some of the sixteen Iraqi divisions arrayed against the Kurds for movement south to Bagh-

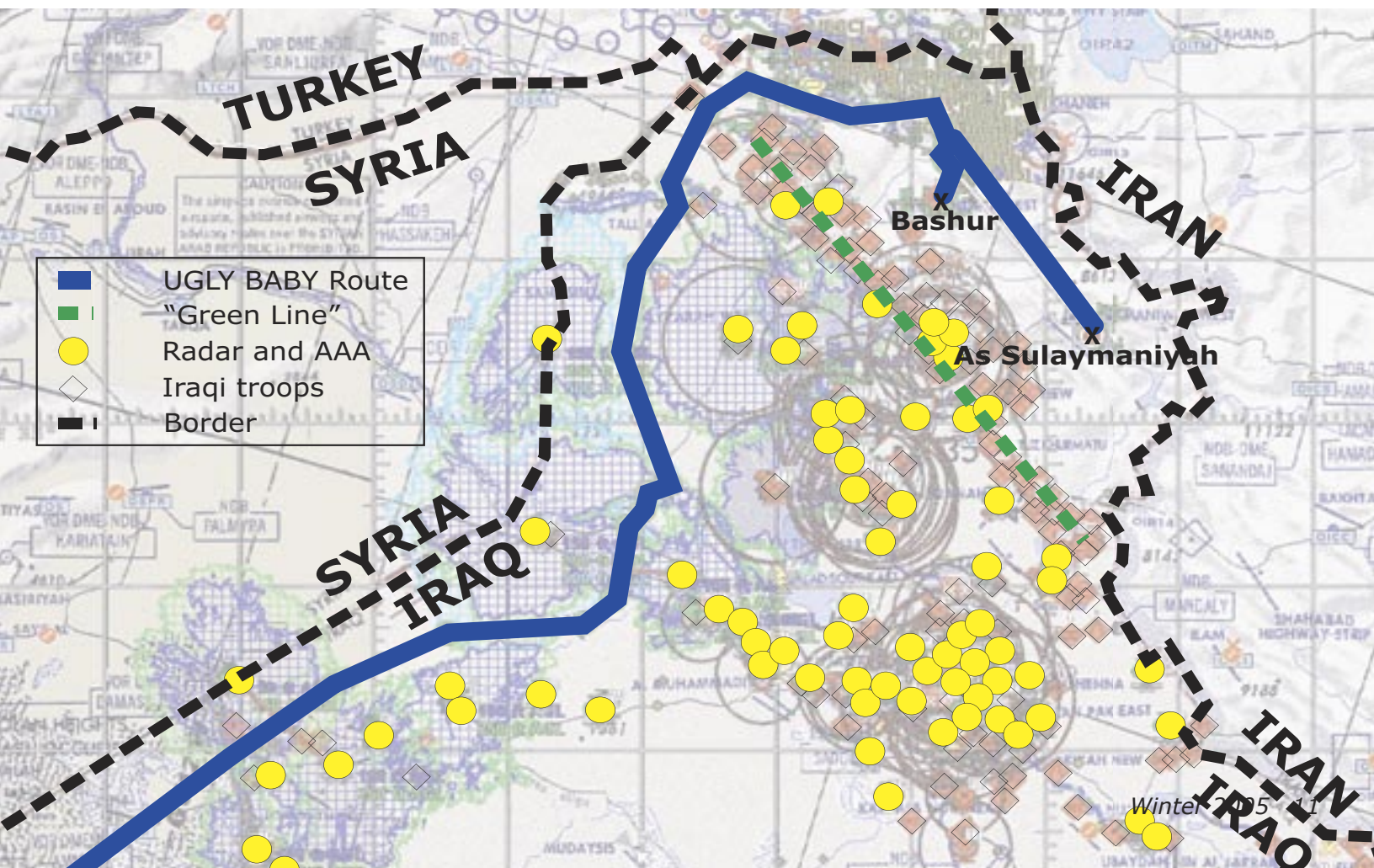
dad, and possible combat against U.S. forces.³

The first leg of the bold two-day air-land infiltration was conducted by six MC-130H aircraft from the 7th Special Operations Squadron, Joint Special Operations Air Detachment–North, flying from Constanta, Romania to another staging base in theater. The second leg began at 1730 hours (Zulu time) on 22 March 2002, when three MC-130s carrying 2/10th SFG soldiers took off for Bashur Airfield, and another three MC-130s carrying 3/10th SFG soldiers, headed for As Sulaymaniyah. (Located north of Irbil, Bashur Airfield would become the site of the 173rd Airborne Brigade jump three days later.) The circuitous infiltration route covered 590 miles at altitudes under 500 feet and required the use of night vision goggles (NVGs) for nocturnal navigation. The Air Force later called this the longest low-level infiltration since World War II. The soldiers knew it as Ugly Baby.⁴

In planning the high-risk movement, the commanders and staff were forced to make many tough decisions. Load plans for all ODAs were altered due to weight limitations on the aircraft. Personnel were also adjusted, in case of the tragic loss of a plane, and all ODAs were

task organized for split team operations.⁵ In the event of a catastrophic aircraft loss, the mission could continue. ODA 062 almost experienced that grim eventuality.

For most of the soldiers, the beginning of the flight into Iraq was uneventful. The commander of ODA 062, Captain (CPT) David McDougal (pseudonym), commented that during the first hour they experienced some turbulence, but it was minor enough that it felt like flying on a training mission from Fort Carson to Fort Polk. The first indication that the flight was anything but routine came when the MC-130 suddenly dropped altitude. People and equipment floated in the simulated weightlessness, the load visibly lifting and straining the ratchet straps that were supposed to keep it in place. As the plane's descent slowed, weight returned with a vengeance, and the soldiers and payload slammed down onto the deck. The inside of the aircraft was filled with the unmistakable sound of chaff firing as the aircraft rolled and jumped to avoid anti-aircraft artillery (AAA). Blinded by the darkness, CPT McDougal focused on the sound of shrapnel hitting the aircraft and anxiously "waited for the side of the plane to open up." Then, almost as suddenly as it had dropped, the



plane leveled out and flew straight to Bashur Airfield.⁶

The MC-130 crew performed a good landing, and the 2/10 SFG soldiers executed a combat offload, grateful to have land under their feet. As arranged, the infiltration team was met by members of their battalion and Kurdish *Peshmerga* fighters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).⁷ CPT McDougal and his half of ODA 062 quickly set to work training a KDP *Peshmerga* quick reaction force company, but found they had to do so



Passengers on one aircraft shaken but unhurt.

without the rest of their team. Assistant Detachment Commander Warrant Officer 1 (WO1) Timothy Zlatich and his half of the ODA had landed in Turkey.

The “B” split of ODA 062, on aircraft number three (call sign “Harley 34”), had a much different flight experience than McDougal’s split. WO1 Zlatich remembered hearing the flashing and popping of AAA fire hitting the sides of the aircraft, and then watching as the padded insulation covering the inside of the aircraft suddenly began to shred as shrapnel cut through the skin and bounced around the interior. Once out of the heavy fire, the pilot continued evasive maneuvers and the passengers quickly checked for casualties. Miraculously, the only casualty inside the aircraft was a box of Meals, Ready to Eat. Nevertheless, the crew chief passed the word that they were diverting to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey.

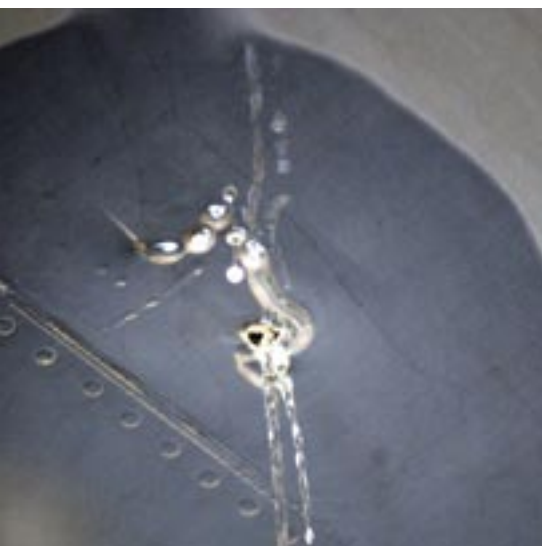
Though the “pucker factor” was high for the rest of

the journey, no one inside the aircraft actually knew the full extent of the damage. The MC-130 landed without problem, and as it taxied, the ramp lowered and the crew chief stepped out onto the ramp to conduct his visual checks. He quickly returned and yelled, “Run!” Responding quickly to the chief’s alarm, the soldiers conducted an emergency exit and assembled one hundred meters to the rear left of the aircraft. Only then did they see the extent of the damage—the left

number one engine was blackened from fire, and fuel was gushing out of both wings. The next morning the soldiers found out that the pilot’s windshield had been blown out from shrapnel, forcing the pilot to fly using instruments alone.⁸ They all felt very lucky to be alive.

After landing, the SF soldiers were led by Air Force personnel to an American reception area, and stayed at Incirlik for a day. They then loaded into a C-17 on the afternoon of 24 March, and, after a quick stop-over at Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany, proceeded back to their starting point—the base at Constanta, Romania. Finally, on 27 March 2003, ODA 062 “B” landed at As Sulaymaniyah Airfield and met up with 3/10th SFG (FOB 103). The forty-nine 2/10th SFG soldiers moved north by ground convoy in order to rejoin with their parent unit.⁹

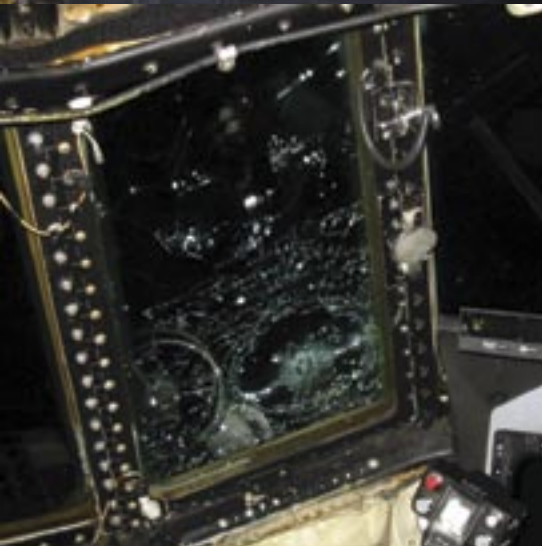
The 2/10th SFG soldiers in the lead aircraft had an excellent view of the Iraqi air defenses that gave their brothers such trouble. To pass time on the flight, a few soldiers decided to look out the windows wearing their NVGs. Since the night was cold, they were able to easily observe the crews of a cluster of four AAA guns huddled around burn barrels for warmth. As the aircraft passed overhead, the Iraqis looked up in apparent surprise at an MC-130 passing 150 feet over their heads. They scrambled to man their guns, but were too slow to fire at the first aircraft. The trailing aircraft were not as fortunate.¹² SFC Chris Yates (pseudonym), of ODA 085, was sleeping in one of those later aircraft, only to be woken by men moving around the cargo hold. He recalled, “The next thing that I know a buddy of mine on my team had his goggles [NVGs] on looking out the window. So I crawled over to look out the window, and I could see tracer fire all over the place.”¹³ Even as the SF soldiers observed the AAA, their pilot took evasive action and chaff soon accompanied the light show.



This MC-130 (call sign "Harley 34") diverted to Incirlik AB, Turkey. Beginning in upper left: fuel leaking from wing tank, engine nacelle, fuselage, past the planes "Highlander" insignia, and down the wing; shattered windshields and glass on left side of the aircraft fuselage, bullet impacts on windshields on left side of the aircraft fuselage; flak holes near the ramp area inside the aircraft.



Photo courtesy of 10th SFG.



ODA 094's flight also started out normally. Many of the soldiers fell asleep, only to be awoken approximately thirty minutes into the flight when "all hell broke loose." The aircraft initially received small arms fire, but heavier fire soon began to crackle in the air outside the aircraft, with shrapnel "splashing" on the metal skin. Dust blanketed the SF soldiers as they were thrown around the cargo hold by the pilots' evasive maneuvers. Sergeant First Class Cordell Johnson, the senior weapons sergeant on ODA 094, described being thrown three body lengths forward and then, just as suddenly, up in the air, only to be slammed back onto the aircraft deck by the next maneuver.

Through a combination of skill and luck, however, the aircraft did make it to the As Sulaymaniyah airfield and ODA 094 joined the rest of third battalion without further incident.

Soon one of the crew chiefs began to yell for the SF soldiers to "check for holes," a task they performed with a sense of urgency.¹⁰ The aircraft continued to maneuver radically for the next 45 to 50 minutes, prompting one veteran SF trooper to remark to his teammate, "I don't know if we are going to make it, man. I don't feel good about this ride." Through a combination of skill and luck, however, the aircraft did make it to the As Sulaymaniyah airfield and ODA 094 joined the rest of FOB 103 without further incident.¹¹

The high-risk gamble of infiltrating by air via a circuitous and low-altitude air route paid off. In a single movement, nineteen ODAs and four ODBs from 10th SFG deployed to northern Iraq and linked up with the Kurdish *Peshmerga* units. This bold move also caused the Turkish government to reconsider the ban on overflight of its territory as perhaps futile. On 23 March 2003, Turkey granted overflight clearance to a flight of three MC-130s, enabling more soldiers and much needed supplies to be brought into the fight.

The Ugly Baby flight quickly faded into memory, but its influence reverberated throughout the war long after the last plane landed. Almost immediately upon arrival, the SF teams moved via buses and civilian cars directly to the Green Line, where they arrayed

against opposing Iraqi forces, tying up valuable Iraqi military resources. In the southern part of the JSOA, the command group at FOB 103 and AOB 090 prepared for the attack on the Ansar al-Islam near the town of Halabjah, an operation that proved crucial to coalition success in the north.¹⁴ Perhaps most importantly, the Ugly Baby flight allowed the U.S. to keep its promise to the Kurds by placing SF teams on the ground in force. In that respect, getting there won the entire battle. 🔴

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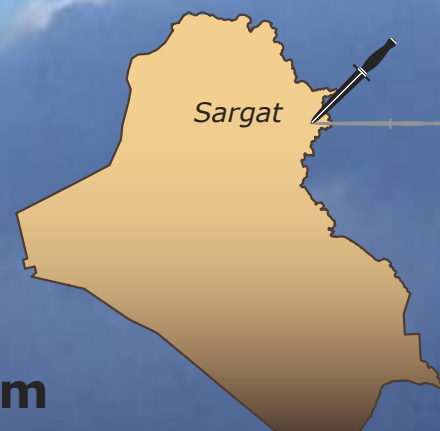
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Operation VIKING HAMMER

3/10 SFG against the Ansar Al-Islam

by Kenn Finlayson



IN preparing his campaign plan for operations in northern Iraq, Colonel (COL) Charles Cleveland, Commander of 10th Special Forces Group (SFG), faced a two-pronged dilemma. His primary opposition in the region came in the form of three Iraqi Corps—more than 150,000 troops massed along the 140-kilometer political boundary known as the Green Line. To confront this force, Cleveland's 300 Special Forces (SF) soldiers joined with more than 50,000 Kurdish fighters arrayed against Iraqi forces. Yet, prior to engaging the Iraqi frontline forces, Cleveland determined he needed to eliminate the threat to the Kurdish rear area posed by the Ansar al-Islam terrorist organization.¹

Ansar al-Islam (AI) routinely skirmished with the Kurdish troops from its stronghold above the town of Halabjah in the mountainous Khurma region near the Iranian border. With well developed defensive positions on the high ground above the valley, the seven hundred-man-strong AI was a formidable threat to any Kurdish operations against the Green Line. A contingent of Iranian-supported Kurds, the Islamic Group of Kurdistan (IGK), also occupied a sector in the northern portion of the area and would need to be dealt with along with the AI. One final threat, a suspected Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) site, was located in the village of Sargat at the foot of the Shandahari Ridge.

10th SFG developed a plan, code named Operation VIKING HAMMER, to deal with the AI. COL Cleveland assigned the mission of reducing the AI threat to 3rd Battalion, which was already fighting Iraqi forces along the Green Line. Reinforced C Company, 3rd Battalion was to counter the AI threat in the east, then rejoin the remainder of 3rd Battalion on the Green Line, where it was fighting alongside 2nd Battalion, 10th SFG; 3rd Battalion, 3rd SFG; and Kurdish forces. Pushing the Iraqi divisions off the Green Line would open the way for the capture of Kirkuk and Mosul, clearing the northern approaches to Baghdad.²

The principal allies in the fight against AI were the 6,500 *Peshmerga* ("those who face death") fighters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), under the ground force command of Kak Mustafa. Mustafa looked to the American Special Forces to provide the firepower and close air support he desired for an attack against AI. Mustafa also realized that having U.S. forces by his side would deter Iran from openly backing AI in battle. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Ken Tovo, commander of 3rd Battalion, and Mustafa formulated a six-pronged attack to drive AI out of the valley, and seize the suspected WMD site at Sargat. Before the attack commenced, however, a demonstration of U.S. firepower and resolve was in order.³

In position for the operation, Operational Detachment A (ODA) 081 occupied



Special Forces 81mm mortar teams supported the Peshmerga forces during the ground assault. The Peshmerga assigned to the Blue assault route provided plenty of supervision as the SF team set up their mortars before the assault.

a small house in Halabjah, looking down the flat valley toward the AI stronghold in the hills above. On the evening of 21 March, LTC Tovo and Kak Mustafa stood on the roof of the house looking up the alley in anticipation of the first missile attack on the AI forces. An anxious twenty-five minutes after the scheduled strike time, the first Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) droned overhead and impacted on the AI positions. Every few minutes for the next three hours, another TLAM struck the target. By the end of the bombardment, sixty-four TLAMs had impacted in the region of the AI base of operations, though with minimum effectiveness, since after the first missile the enemy took shelter in their caves. Missiles detonated around the WMD facility at Sargat, and throughout the targeted sector, but did not significantly degrade AI's defensive positions. However, the TLAM strikes did drive the IGK from their positions, and eliminated the organization as a factor in the battle.⁴

Though the TLAMs had prepared the battlefield on the 21st, the ground attack was delayed until 3rd Battalion could get more troops on the ground and air support lined up. VIKING HAMMER was built around a six-pronged attack up the valley. From north to south, the assault routes were designated Orange, Black, Green, Yellow, Red, and Blue. Each prong consisted of nine hundred to fifteen hundred *Peshmerga* fighters, accompanied by members of an SF ODA. In order to command the fight, LTC Tovo colocated Forward Operating Base (FOB) 103 with Major Greg Tsouris' (pseudonym) Advanced Operating Base (AOB) 090 on Hill 654, where they could see almost the entire valley. Members of AOB 090 also manned 81mm mortars in support of Green and Red routes, with supplemental targets on Blue route.⁵

At 0600 on 28 March, the attack commenced. The Yellow prong aimed for the devastated WMD site at Sargat, and the flanking routes targeted the AI on the succession of hills and ridges around the site. The speed of the *Peshmerga* attack resulted in rapid advance on all the routes. "The *Pesh* generally looked for a weak point, attacked it with all their weapons, then bum rushed the target," is the description of PUK tactics given by Sergeant First Class Mark Greenlaw (pseudonym), in charge of the three-gun 81mm mortar section supporting Yellow route.⁶ The Kurdish fighters' pace made it difficult for the mortar section to follow the frontline trace. Coupled with the reluctance of the *Peshmerga* to allow supporting fires close to their own troops, the speed required Greenlaw and his crew to frequently halt in order pinpoint the targets.⁷ Due to the onrush of the *Peshmerga* up the valley, the AI fighters were unable to

Once the Yellow route assault force reached the hills, they used the natural topography to hide their approach on Objective Yahtzee.



deliberately retrograde and take advantage of their prepared positions and caches of weapons and equipment.

The combined force made considerable progress along all the assault routes that first day. Troops advancing along routes Red and Blue secured several of the small villages in the valley. Blue prong advanced up the valley and halted for the night at the village of Biyara. As they swept through the valley, SF and *Peshmerga* soldiers observed the AI fighters fleeing higher up the valley from the Biyara area to more heavily fortified positions on the slopes of Shram Mountain. The swift capture of Hill 868 allowed the troops on the Green route to overwatch the Yellow advance toward Sargat. Yellow prong forces seized the AI checkpoint, cleared a series of caves along the route, and split to send one element against the town of Bahka Kon. The northern element headed to Sargat, which was secured at approximately 1000 hours.⁸ Troops assigned to route Black served as the reserve force. On the northernmost route, the forces on the Orange prong attacked east from Shilamar to Hill 1351, where they were stopped for the day. The hill supported a communications tower and bunker with approximately twenty AI troops, who withstood three air strikes and kept the PUK from advancing closer than two hundred meters from the bunker.⁹

Once darkness fell, the PUK troops regrouped and consolidated their positions. Four AC-130 gunships maintained pressure on the scattered AI fighters, and prevented them from regrouping. By morning, the *Peshmerga* were ready to resume the offensive.¹⁰ The attack continued on 29 March with the forces on the Green route advancing northeast and seizing the high ground on Hill 1365. The Yellow route forces pushed out from Sargat and expanded their perimeter to include the villages of Hanidind and Damarar. The forces on Red consolidated their gains in the vicinity of Biyara. The troops on Black, held in reserve the previous day, joined with the Orange prong to conduct a coordinated attack up the Zalm Valley and the northern approaches, where they secured Hill 1351.

Throughout the rest of the day and into the next, the PUK chased AI towards the Iranian border, where many crossed without difficulty, while others were met with fire from the Iranians and forced back toward the *Peshmerga*.¹¹ By 30 March, the PUK was in control of the formerly AI-dominated valley and held the high ground overwatching the area running towards the Iranian border. VIKING HAMMER had eliminated AI as an effective fighting force, and removed the threat to the PUK rear area.

With this accomplished, the mission transitioned to supporting the PUK forces on the Green Line.

The presence of the SF teams helped the *Peshmerga* in numerous ways, from providing close air support and indirect fire, to assisting with command and control



Green Prong forces captured several hills during the assault, moving higher into the AI's territory with each gain."

and combined planning before the attack. The SF presence was important in less quantifiable ways, as well. As LTC Tovo remarked, "the morale boost for the PUK of seeing U.S. SF in their ranks cannot be understated. The ODA members attacking with them were tangible proof that the U.S. was committed to providing them assistance."¹² In the weeks that followed the assault, Chemical and Biological Inspection Survey Teams and Document Exploitation Teams were able to examine the secured Sargat site. The PUK spent its time consolidating its hold over the region, and planning for the next stage of their long-awaited fight against Saddam's regime. With the AI threat gone, 3rd Battalion, SFG and the PUK were free to join the rest of the Kurdish



Coalition forces identified the Ansar al-Islam facility at Sargat as a possible WMD site. TLAMs destroyed part of the compound, and once the forces on the Yellow route captured Sargat, specialized teams examined the site for evidence.

forces in attacking the Iraqis on the Green Line and opening the way for coalition control of the north. 📍

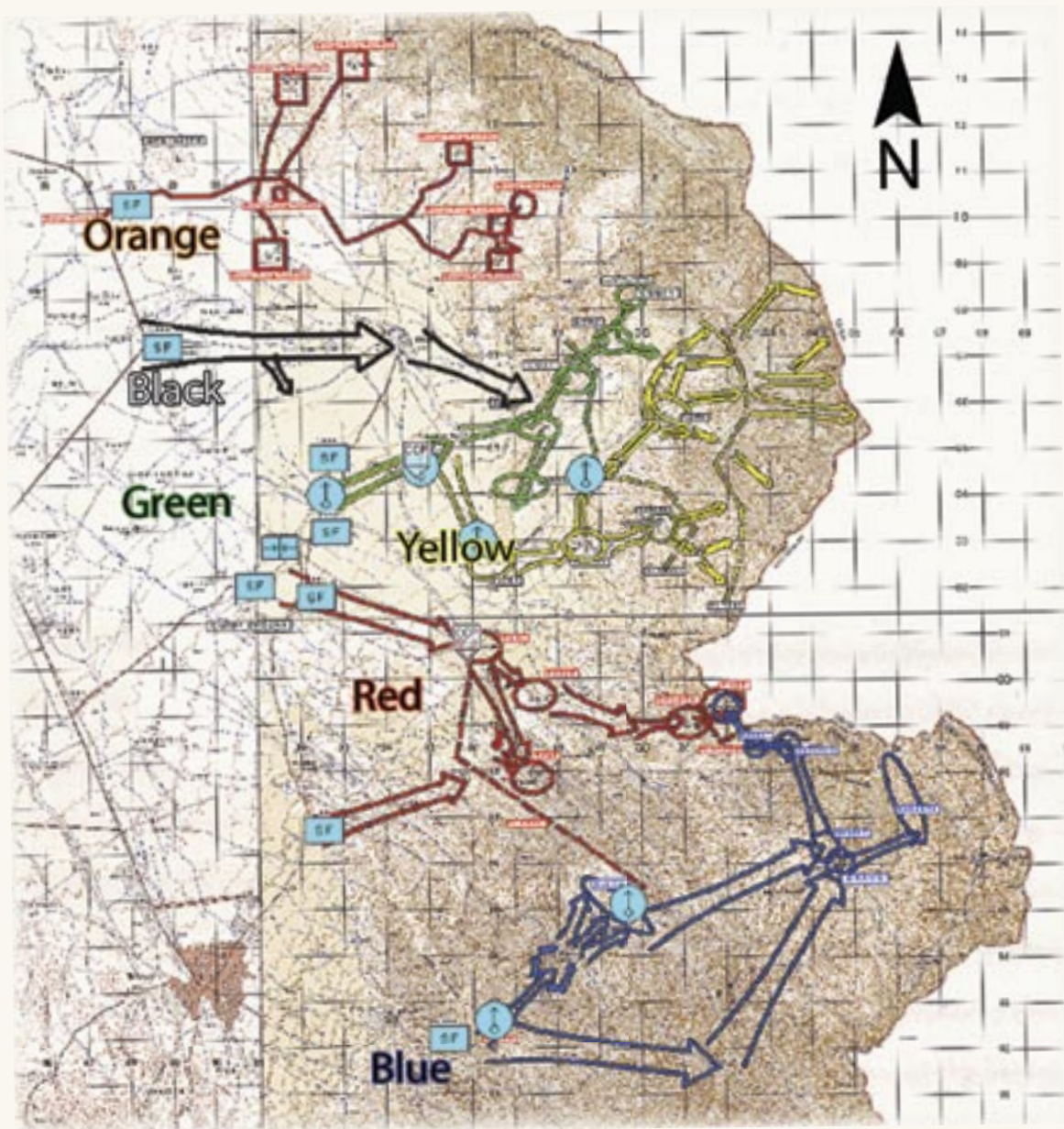
Kenn Finlayson has been the USAJFKSWCS Command Historian since 2000. He earned his PhD from the University of Maine, and is a retired Army officer. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, special operations aviation, and World War II special operations units.

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The main assault of Operation VIKING HAMMER comprised six routes, or prongs, of attack: Orange, Black, Green, Yellow, Red, and Blue (arranged another to south). Each assault force consisted of between nine hundred and fifteen hundred Peshmerga, with SF personnel providing support. The Yellow, Red, and Blue prongs thrust into the hills to root out the AI from their strongholds.

Value Added: A/1/19th SFG in Iraq



by Robert W. Jones, Jr.

ONE of the hallmarks of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) is the integration of Reserve component units into the overall operation. During their participation in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group (A/1/19th) demonstrated the ability of National Guard Special Forces (SF) teams not only to integrate with the Active force, but also to exemplify the Special Forces core values especially versatility. In the words of one veteran sergeant, "19th Group broke the mold of old fat guys; the Guard [could] do the mission."²

During initial call up of National Guard Special Forces units after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, A/1/19th SFG provided individual replacement personnel for other units being deployed while the remainder of the company concentrated on previously scheduled peacetime training exercises. Eventually, twelve A/1/19th

soldiers deployed to Afghanistan in support of 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG).

In July 2002, the company was selected to conduct a joint combined exchange training (JCET) exercise in Malaysia. Training was centered around counterterrorism and emphasized close quarters combat and sniper skills.

While the company was still in Malaysia, it was notified that upon its return, the unit would mobilize and deploy to the Middle East. Contrary to expectations that A/1/19th would be sent to Afghanistan, the company command soon learned that the unit was being sent to Kuwait in support of Operation DESERT SPRING.

Operation DESERT SPRING (ODS) was the United Nations approved ongoing contingency deployment developed after Operation DESERT STORM as support for Operation SOUTHERN WATCH the enforcement of the No Fly Zones in southern Iraq.³

VERSATILITY. Special Forces soldiers adapt quickly to rapidly changing environments, consistently operating and easily transitioning across the entire spectrum of conflict, from peace to war. [Special Forces are] truly a capability-based organization, providing the widest range of capabilities to accomplish assigned missions.¹

The Special Forces commitment for ODS was a reinforced company of between five and nine SF teams, operating as coalition support teams (CSTs) training and working with the Kuwaiti army. In the event of aggression by Iraqi forces, the Special Forces CSTs would provide support to the Kuwaitis, deconflicting any problems between coalition units and providing terminal guidance with close air support in order to defend the Kuwait Iraq border.⁴ In order to meet the requirements of ODS, A/1/19th SFG was reinforced with a support slice from the group headquarters and a military intelligence Special Operations Team Alpha (SOT A), bringing the total force deploying to approximately 110 soldiers.⁵

Between 26 and 28 September 2002, A/1/19th SFG arrived in Kuwait and immediately set to work. Its primary mission was training and conducting liaison duties with elements of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces.

Some of the A/1/19th Operational Detachments Alpha (ODAs) trained with the Kuwaiti 35th Mechanized Brigade and other conventional units, while others trained with the Kuwaiti Naval Commandos. One of the most important tasks accomplished was extensive close air support (CAS) training, including an urban CAS scenario on the Faylakah Island range complex. The company also conducted extensive demolitions and live fire training with Ground Mobility Vehicles (GMVs), the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV, “humvee”) modified for desert operations.

In addition to the CST mission, by November 2002 the staff of A/1/19th began planning and training to support 5th SFG in the event of combat operations against Iraq under Operations Plan (OPLAN) 1003V. According to the OPLAN, two SF forward operating bases (FOBs 52 and 53) would operate in southern Iraq supporting the con

Members of ODA 912 witnessed their first “Baghdad Sunrise” on 10 April 2003. They welcomed the dawn after spending hours hunkered down in a maintenance building in the Baghdad International Airport complex while 3rd Infantry Division and Iraqi defenders lit the night sky with tracer fire.

ventional force (the Coalition Forces Land Component Command or CFLCC) as it moved north to Baghdad.⁶

Under Major Greg Allen, A/1/19th began training for an SF liaison element (SFLE) mission with coalition forces. The SF planners' major concern was avoiding fratricide of ODAs conducting strategic reconnaissance (SR) and unconventional warfare missions beyond the forward edge of the battle area.⁷ Even as planning progressed, ODA 912 was given a special mission tasking to Coalition Forces Special Operations Component



As Special Forces Liaison Elements, the ODAs of A/1/19th were tasked with the difficult job of ensuring that 3rd Infantry Division and 101st Airborne Division did not mistake 5th Group's forward-deployed ODAs for enemy forces. In exchange for such deconfliction, the conventional forces provided ODA 915 with support, such as fuel for their GMVs.

Command (CFSOCC) headquarters.⁸ With ODA 912 at CFSOCC and a number of men still with 3rd SFG in Afghanistan, the rest of A/1/19th was assigned as SFLEs to both U.S. and coalition conventional ground forces.⁹

As war neared, the remaining five ODAs of A/1/19th began their SFLE missions. ODAs 911 and 913 were assigned to 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1st MEF), primarily supporting the 1st Marine Division. ODA 915 became the SFLE for the 101st Airborne Division. To support both the British 1st Armored Division and the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division (3rd ID), ODA 914 operated as a "split team." The ODA commander and the team sergeant led the "A" split and supported the British. The "B" split of ODA 914 joined ODA 916 in support of 3rd ID, whose mission comprised the main effort of

Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: the assault on Baghdad.

With only one and a half ODAs to cover the entire 3rd ID, ODA 916 split into three teams, giving the SFLE four functioning splits. Each of the three ODA 916 splits consisted of four men and a single GMV, with one split each assigned to 3/7th Cavalry, the division cavalry squadron, and the lead brigades. ODA 914B also distributed its efforts among the 3rd ID units. While in their tactical assembly areas, the SF teams began coordinating with their assigned units. Much of the coordination was designed to prevent fratricide of forward-deployed SF teams operating in nonstandard vehicles.

As President Bush's deadline for action neared, ODA 916 conducted a detailed analysis of the 3rd ID plan, cross-referenced it with the 5th SFG (acting as Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF)-West) plan, and made face-to-face coordination with the individual ODAs and 3rd ID units. During the coordination with the 3rd ID staff, battalion commanders identified the companies and platoons likely to be tasked with the on-order mission to conduct a relief and passage of lines. ODA 916 developed a training plan and practiced the drill with all of the designated platoons. The effort expended during the training proved worthwhile once hostilities commenced and the 5th SFG ODAs successfully infiltrated into southern Iraq.¹⁰

On the morning of 20 March 2003, coalition forces began the ground assault on Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.¹¹ One of the first deconfliction missions conducted by ODA 914B with the 3rd ID concerned the linkup with ODA 555 in As Samawah. After conducting SR on the Qadasiyah Canal Bridges, ODA 555 was concerned that with 3rd ID units fighting throughout the city, they might be fired upon. ODA 555 maintained security and stayed in its hide site until ODA 914B could escort the team safely back to the 3rd ID's tactical command post.

As OPLAN 1003V was refined and supporting plans were developed at all levels, 1st MEF added to its combat power by creating Task Force (TF) Tarawa. Centered on the headquarters of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, and consisting of three infantry battalions and attached logistics, artillery, engineer, tank, reconnaissance, and light armored vehicle companies, TF Tarawa was of considerable size. Since all of A/1/19th's ODAs were tasked out, the company headquarters—Operational Detachment-Bravo (ODB) 910—task organized to become a sixth SFLE. The twelve soldiers quickly adapted and soon the mechanic manned the M2 .50 caliber machine gun and a rigger manned the MK19 40mm grenade

launcher, allowing ODB 910 to ride into action with the Marines. As TF Tarawa moved through Iraq, ODB 910 coordinated fire support with the various ODAs infiltrated into the area of operations, which numbered between five and ten teams at any given time.¹²

ODA 915 began its SFLE mission to the 101st Airborne Division by linking up with the division at Camp New Jersey in Kuwait. The team worked in shifts in the division's main tactical operations center (D-main) to coordinate space, to track the 5th SFG units with Blue Force Trackers, and to provide updates to the command.¹³ Once the 101st left Kuwait, ODA 915 conducted split team operations; ODA 915A accompanied Major General (MG) David Petraeus and the division tactical center, while ODA 915B followed about a day later with D-main.

Serving with the 101st occasionally provided an opportunity to do more than liaison work. Staff Sergeant (SSG) Ethan Hansen (pseudonym) represented the special operations forces (SOF) element in a war gaming session conducted by MG Petraeus. After the field-grade officers reviewed several scenarios for operations in An Najaf, MG Petraeus turned to SSG Hansen and asked, "SOF, what do you think?" Hansen replied, "Sir, this is what I would do," and explained a course of action. The assembled officers criticized Hansen's plan extensively, until they were cut off by the general: "Okay, this is what we

are going to do—exactly what [Hansen] said."¹⁴

After the division had moved north for approximately two weeks, ODA 915 was reassigned to CJSOTF-West, and subsequently attached to advanced operating base (AOB) 570 and two ODAs from 3rd Battalion, 5th SFG, in the vicinity of An Najaf. This spelled the end of ODA 915's SFLE mission and a chance to prove its versatility by taking on new missions. ODA 915's responsibilities in An Najaf included gathering intelligence and conducting raids on high value targets (important enemy personnel). On 10 April 2003, ODA 915 became the quick reaction force for an incident sparked by rival Muslim cleric Imam Abdul Majid al-Khoei, who attempted to enter the Imam Ali Mosque. Although the team arrived within minutes of the attempt, it was too late: al-Khoei had been stabbed to death by a mob. A warrant was later issued for the arrest of Muqtada al-Sadr for his role in the murder.¹⁵ ODA 915 also found itself locating and cleaning out weapons caches from local schools. The weapons, mines, mortars, and ammunition were consolidated, and some of the items were used to rearm the Iraqi police and the Civil Defense Corps.¹⁶

While the other five ODAs assumed SFLE duties, ODA 912 was selected for a special mission. In early December 2002, ODA 912 was assigned to CFSOCC with duty as a personal security team (PST) for Brigadier General Gary Harrell. The team immediately

Although not a lead combat team while serving as liaison to the 101st Airborne Division, ODA 915 suffered through the same elemental challenges as everybody else, including blinding sandstorms.



started training for this unusual mission, using the Diplomatic Security Service manual as a resource. The team flew to Qatar, where CFSOCC headquarters was located, and continued training. In anticipation of a move forward to Iraq, ODA 912 planned for various contingencies. The team also spent time in Qatar training a small detail of military police as a security force for the tactical operations center.

Although “stuck” in Qatar for three weeks while the rest of A/1/19th waged war, members of ODA 912 did finally make it to Iraq. On 10 April 2003, four team members and SOCCENT Command Sergeant

From peacetime training exercises to personal security details, locally patrolling on foot to planning a 101st Airborne Division’s operation, and palace renovation team to Special Forces liaison element, A/1/19th successfully completed every mission it was handed.

Major (CSM) Jay F. Lovelace loaded one GMV on an MC-130 from the Pennsylvania Air National Guard and flew to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) in blackout conditions.¹⁷ The flight began uneventfully, but once it hit the Karbala Gap, the plane received heavy anti-aircraft and ground fire, including rockets. The soldiers later learned that their plane was only the second one to land at BIAP since the war began.¹⁸

A firefight between 3rd ID soldiers and Iraqi defenders blocked the SF soldiers and the sergeant major from moving directly from their plane to their final destination in the airport complex. While the 3rd ID continued its fighting in and around the airport, the newly arrived group found and secured a maintenance building on the west side of the airfield. The men joined several 3rd ID soldiers watching the red and green tracers flashing against the night sky, and soon saw their first “Baghdad sunrise”—a red sun rising through the dust and smoke of combat, outlined in the landscape of the city.

Once the rest of ODA 912 rejoined the advance party, the team secured one of Saddam’s small palaces (a “ballroom palace”) about one kilometer south of BIAP. The palace, which became CFSOCC forward headquarters, was three stories tall with thirty rooms, including several large ballrooms (perfect for the operations center), and a large pool within the compound. Once settled into its new team house (the pool cabana), ODA 912 added local patrols to its mission profile.

After the initial thirty days as SFLEs, A/1/19th began additional missions with FOBs 52 and 53. For the most part, these consisted of a 19th SFG team colocating with a 5th SFG team for increased capability. Combined, the two ODAs could then provide additional security and conduct missions. As major Iraqi resistance evaporated, the ODAs completed the transition from the SFLE mission and prepared to go home.

After ten months in the Middle East, the soldiers of A/1/19th began to redeploy home in June 2003. The ODAs first traveled by ground with their vehicles to Kuwait. Once vehicles and weapons were maintained and cleaned, they packed their equipment and began perhaps the most tedious part of any operation—waiting for a ride home. After spending three weeks at Camp Arifjan, A/1/19th finally returned home to Buckley, Washington.

In the course of a single deployment, A Company, 1st Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group tested and proved its own versatility. From peacetime training exercises to personal security details, locally patrolling on foot to planning a 101st Airborne Division’s operation, and palace renovation to Special Forces liaison element, A/1/19th successfully completed every mission it was handed. 📌

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In mid-April, ODA 912 joined the 3rd Infantry Division at Baghdad International Airport (formerly Saddam International Airport). The airport complex was not only strategically vital, but also gave coalition forces temporary shelter preceding the liberation of Baghdad.



North by Northwest:

Combat Service Support in Northern Iraq



by A. Dwayne Aaron and Cherilyn A. Walley

Even as the last soldier was leaving the aircraft, the loadmaster was raising the ramp and the pilot was gunning the engines for takeoff.

THE hydraulics of the MC-130 whined in protest as it twisted and turned, climbed and dropped through the dark Iraqi sky. Hours earlier in Romania, the troopers of Bravo Forward Support Company (FSC), 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, had loaded and strapped their equipment to the floor of the aircraft and buckled themselves into the jump seats. The battle for northern Iraq was raging and the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-North) needed a command post closer to the fight. For weeks Bravo FSC had been in Romania safe and secure, far from the battle; now it was about to set down in the middle of “Indian” country and build a base for the 10th Special Forces command group. Its destination was an abandoned Iraqi airstrip outside the city of Irbil in northern Iraq.¹

During their preflight briefings, the loadmaster informed the Bravo FSC soldiers that the aircraft would be doing a combat off-load. He explained that the area around the airfield was considered hostile and the combat landing was necessary to minimize the aircraft’s time on the ground. Although several of the Bravo FSC soldiers had been in combat in Afghanistan, none had ever done a combat landing in an MC-130. Inside the bucking aircraft jammed with soldiers and equipment, there was not a lot of talking going on; each soldier was lost in thought. Some went through a mental checklist of

what they had to do on the ground. Others thought of loved ones back home and remembered more pleasant times. Still others nervously checked their weapons and ammo one last time—again. And some, the more fortunate ones, drifted off to sleep.

When the loadmaster gave the twenty minutes warning, the interior lights were switched from white to red to help the soldiers’ eyes to adjust to the dark. Wherever their minds had been before, everyone was focused now. There was a flurry of activity as the troopers checked the quick release on the ramp pallet and geared up. To minimize exposure to enemy ground fire, the aircraft would not come to a complete stop, but would continue rolling while the pallet slid off the ramp, followed by the soldiers. The loadmaster gave the one minute warning. The soft red light revealed that beneath the camouflage face paint, everyone was ready. The aircraft banked sharply, the hydraulics screamed and the landing gear thumped as it locked in place. Then, for what seemed hours although it was only a few seconds, the plane seemed suspended in the air while the wheels searched and reached in the dark for the ground. Every trooper silently breathed a sigh of relief as the wheels made contact. Getting there was sometimes more than half the battle.

The MC-130 taxied quickly to the end of the flight strip and made a 180-degree turn. As it turned, the loadmaster opened the

tailgate and lowered the ramp. The cavernous hole where the ramp had been reminded the troopers of a “black hole” in space. The equipment pallet was released and was sucked into the black hole. With the plane still moving, the loadmaster turned to the section leader and yelled, “Go, go, go!” The Bravo troopers hurriedly followed the pallet into the darkness and took up security positions on the edge of the runway. Even as the last soldier was leaving the aircraft, the loadmaster was raising the ramp and the pilot was gunning the engines for takeoff. In mere seconds, the MC-130 was airborne and receded into the darkness.²

For Major (MAJ) Ronald Green’s Bravo FSC, preparation began months earlier when it was given the mission to provide direct combat service support to the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) and CJSOTF-North. In early February, MAJ Green dispatched a Movement Control Team (MCT) to Fort Carson, Colorado, to assist the 10th Special Forces Group with its air movement to an intermediate staging base (ISB) in Germany.³ In the past, the 10th SFG had deployed a relatively small number of people and depended upon the installation movement control team for assistance. The deployment of the entire 10th Special Forces Group plus other units at Fort Carson exceeded the installation’s capabilities to assist. First Lieutenant (1LT) Marty Calkins, a veteran of operations in Afghanistan, headed up the MCT sent to help the 10th SFG deploy.⁴

The three-man team from Bravo FSC brought with them subject matter expertise and practical experience working with Air Force load teams. 1LT Calkins worked with each company to prepare load plans, weigh the vehicles and pallets, calculate centers of gravity, perform safety inspections, and provide certifications for hazardous material.⁵ Once the airflow was underway, MAJ Green dispatched another team to Germany to assist with the reception of the unit personnel and equipment. Stuttgart, Germany, was only intended to be a temporary ISB until the political issues with Turkey were settled. Then everything would flow into



An advance Movement Control Team from Bravo Forward Support Company, 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, helped 10th Special Forces Group prepare their equipment for deployment. The MCT provided load preparation expertise at both Fort Carson, Colorado and Stuttgart, Germany.

Constanta, Romania served as an intermediate staging base (ISB) for the 10th Special Forces Group and Bravo Forward Support Company prior to infiltrating into northern Iraq. A resort town on the Black Sea in the summer months, Constanta proved to be cold and bleak in February and March, as evidenced by the snow blanketing these MH-53 helicopters at nearby Mihail Air Base.



the planned intermediate staging base at Dyarkibir Air Force Base, Turkey. As it turned out, the issue was not favorably resolved in time, and almost the entire force ended up deploying into Stuttgart.⁶

As troops and equipment began to build up in Germany, the CJSOTF-North staff developed alternatives to the planned ISB in Turkey. A number of possibilities were examined, but in the end, Colonel Charlie Cleveland, 10th SFG commander, opted to move the ISB to Constanta, Romania, to get as close as possible to the operational area. Constanta is a popular Romanian summer resort town on the Black Sea with Mihail Airbase nearby. This airbase could not only accommodate the large C-5, C-141, and C-17 Air Force transports, but also had enough ramp space to park a number of them on the ground for unloading, loading, and overnight stops. Constanta was approximately ten miles away and, because it was the winter off-season, there were a number of hotels available for contract billeting. Everything else that was needed for base operations could also be contracted locally. At the time, it also seemed likely that even if Turkey did not allow basing or ground transit of U.S. forces, surely they would allow overflight.⁷ That assumption initially proved to be false.

Constanta may be a resort area during the summer, but in late February and early March 2003 it was a cold, bleak, and windy place. The first troops on the ground lived and worked on the windswept airfield in unheated tents. Once the contracts were in place, living and working conditions improved dramatically. The troops were, for the most part, supplied, fueled, transported, billeted, and fed by contracted sources coordinated and supervised by Bravo FSC. While CJSOTF-North remained in Constanta, all tactical operations were coordinated and planned from Mihail Air Base. Bravo FSC helped set up the CJSOTF-North Operations Center at the airfield and established the power to run the myriad of lights, computers, and other electronic devices in the headquarters. The company's mechanics

worked long and hard to make sure that all the deploying vehicles were modified to carry the increased amounts of equipment, fuel, and weapons needed to operate independently in northern Iraq. In addition to helping run power to all the CJSOTF-North tents, Specialist Chad Olsen, a power generation expert from Elyria, Ohio, helped prepare equipment pallets, set up heaters, and pitch tents. In Bravo FSC it was typical for soldiers to pitch in as needed, regardless of MOS (Military Occupational Skill). Olsen noted, "I even helped some Croatian contract technicians set up the Titan system (RF visibility tagging system) used to track our pallets and containers of equipment."⁸

The dispute with Turkey had a major impact on 10th SFG's infiltration plan. When the planned ground assault through Turkey had to be scrapped, U.S. Central Command planners looked to 10th SFG and the 173rd Airborne Brigade as a way to put as many U.S. troops on the ground in northern Iraq as quickly as possible. 10th SFG had already changed its planning to incorporate the seemingly inevitable air infiltration, but the decision to send in the 173rd caused a shift in airlift priority, especially for the C-17s that had originally been tasked with transporting 10th SFG's support package. With the C-17s diverted in anticipation of the 173rd's infiltration, 10th SFG was forced to recon-

Bravo Forward Support Company, 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, established Fuel System Supply Points (FSSPs) in northern Iraq in order to provide fuel support to aviation elements, such as the CH-47 helicopter supporting Army SOF shown here. Fuel pods, or "onion skins", are surrounded by earthen berms for protection and containment.



figure its loads for transport by MC-130s.⁹

As the infiltration phase of the operation began, nearly everyone available in Bravo FSC helped prepare the Special Forces teams' vehicles and equipment. The company's four-man MCT formed the nucleus of a larger team to support the entire CJSOTF-North. The rest of the team was formed by drafting unit truck drivers, mechanics, and anyone else who was available. The MCT loaded and unloaded aircraft, certified loads, prepared load plans, and adjusted to the airflow.¹⁰ Staff Sergeant (SSG) Michael Daigle, a New Orleans native and ammunition section leader, remembered that the airflow and the type of aircraft were constantly changing: "We would build a pallet for a C-17, and two hours later we would be told we were getting a C-130 and we'd have to tear down the pallet and rebuild it [to fit the new aircraft]. You didn't know what bird you were leaving on until it showed up."¹¹

Most of the combat service support elements remained in Romania through the first infiltration, but two notable exceptions were the Fuel System Supply Point (FSSP) teams that infiltrated into northern Iraq near Bashur and As Sulaymaniah. Their missions were to provide forward refueling for Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) and special operations aircraft. With Kurdish fighters and their assigned Special Forces Teams providing security for the sites, the teams were flown in under cover of darkness.¹² On the night of 25 March 2003, the first fuel team, headed by SSG Jose Uribe, infiltrated into Bashur Airfield in support of Forward Operating Base (FOB) 102 and was on hand when the 173rd Airborne jumped on the airfield the next morning.¹³

Three days later, Sergeant (SGT) Danny Tyler and his team of self-described "Fuel Dawgs" were told to get their equipment together and load it onto an MC-130, because they were going into northern Iraq to support FOB 103. The team of eight fuelers loaded the pumping unit, two collapsible fuel bags, and fifty 20-foot sections of four inch fuel hose on the floor of the aircraft. Because of weight restrictions for the long

flight from Romania, the team had to leave its HMMWVs behind; instead, it loaded Gator utility vehicles to move the equipment off the aircraft and position the fuel pods. Tyler's team strapped its only pallet, loaded with the pumping unit, onto the ramp of the aircraft.¹⁴

When the FSSP team arrived at As Sulaymaniah, they found



Under the supervision of Bravo FSC, Kurdish contractors built an Ammunition Supply Point (ASP) outside the base camp at Bashur Airfield near Irbil. A twenty-foot high berm surrounded the ASP, with six inner berms separating ammunition stacks. This ASP served special operations forces throughout northern Iraq.

that the mud near the airfield was so deep that it was impossible to set up the fuel bags without some site preparation. The team contracted Kurdish locals to dig pits and line them with gravel to prevent the fuel bags from disappearing in the mud when filled. Once the FSSP was up and running, it was able to service the special operations MH-47s and MH-53s that comprised the majority of its clients. On one memorable occasion, however, the FSSP team serviced an MC-130 that landed at the airfield critically low on fuel. The FSSP received its fuel resupply via MC-130s using the "wet-wing technique"—an incoming plane empties all the fuel from its tanks into the fuel bags, except what it needs to return to the rear area.¹⁵

At the end of March, CJSOTF-North deployed forward from Romania to an abandoned Iraqi airfield near Irbil. While the airfield was isolated and austere, it was better situated for command operations. SGT Earl Gupton, a Henderson, North Carolina, native and SGT Chavis Moultry of Troy, Alabama, were among the first Bravo FSC troopers into Irbil. A few short days before they deployed, they were told to get ready to establish a bare-base forward operating base (FOB) but were provided no further details. On the night of 30 March, SGT Gupton's team loaded



In a matter of days, Bravo FSC erected a forward operating base (FOB) at Bashur Airfield outside Irbil. The facilities supported twenty-four hundred personnel, and provided service and support to special operations soldiers in such places as Mosul, Kirkuk and Al Sulaymaniah.

aboard an MC-130 for a fully blacked-out infiltration into Irbil. “The first priority that night,” said SGT Gupton, “was to dig a fighting position and hunker down.”¹⁶

SGT Moultry’s team flew in the next night along the infamous “Ugly Baby” infiltration route, as described at the beginning of this article. Of the experience, Moultry exclaimed, “It was pretty crazy; the night was pitch black! You couldn’t see nothing!” When morning came, SGT Moultry received perhaps an even bigger surprise; instead of the desert he expected to see, he discovered the airfield was surrounded by lush green vegetation.¹⁷

When daylight came, Bravo FSC secured the base camp location and began to work on establishing a forward base for CJSOTF-North. Bravo FSC personnel erected the Operations Center, sleeping tents, mess, medical facilities, and eventually even installed showers.¹⁸ In the beginning, the Iraqis fired rockets nightly, but the fire was never very accurate and always brought a quick response from the air cover flying overhead. After about a week, the attacks stopped. SGT Gupton guessed that “the aircraft attacks had either wiped out all the Iraqis, or they finally figured out that shooting rockets at the camp was hazardous to their health.”¹⁹

In a matter of days, Bravo FSC had constructed a base for twenty-four hundred personnel. It cleared

land, erected tents, drilled wells, and established supply points for all classes of supply. Using Kurdish contractors, Bravo FSC had an ammunition supply point (ASP) built outside the base camp to serve all special operations forces (SOF) in northern Iraq. It was enclosed by a twenty-foot high perimeter berm about a mile in circumference, with six interior berms. The local Kurdish Peshmerga provided an outer ring of security for the Americans. SSG Daigle recalled that “the Kurds were extremely hospitable, friendly people” and brought his team hot tea every morning.²⁰

Possibly the hardest working and most indispensable soldiers of Bravo FSC were the truckers. These drivers and their trucks were critical to the movement of supplies between SOF units at Bashur, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Al Sulaymaniah. The Bravo FSC truck squads moved urgently needed food, water, ammunition, and supplies both day and night over dangerous and hazardous roads. The platoon also provided convoy escort for local contract vehicles, as well as providing its own convoy security. It logged over ten thousand miles without losing a single vehicle or soldier to accident or hostile action.²¹

The impact of Bravo Forward Support Company far exceeded the number of soldiers deployed. Small

teams worked largely unseen at critical nodes to ensure that the supplies and equipment needed by SOF operators were delivered on time and in the correct quantities. The normal ratio of support troops to combat soldiers is on the order of at least six to one, but Bravo FSC's ninety deployed soldiers supported approximately three thousand SOF personnel in those first days of the war, a ratio of less than one support soldier to every two combat soldier. When asked how it was able to accomplish so much with so few, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Francis Rush, Direct Support Maintenance Technician, said, "In our shop at Bragg, we have a sign that says 'We are MOS Gender-Benders,' which means that we cross train everybody. When you are a small unit you have to pitch in and help wherever you're needed."²² It was just such an attitude that enabled the men and women of Bravo FSC, 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, to provide the critical support required in northern Iraq. 📌

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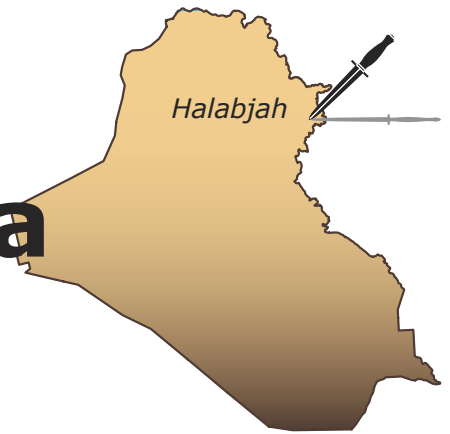


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Personnel from Bravo FSC put their construction skills and tools to good use in Iraq.

SOF and the Media

During Operation IRAQI FREEDOM



by Cherilyn A. Walley

SOF soldiers carried out the embed program “in a very professional manner. They understood the importance of it, they understood the mission, and they never tried to impede it.”

SOME of the most exciting news reported during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) has been the result of the Department of Defense’s (DoD’s) program to embed media with frontline troops, including special operations forces (SOF). Embedding has allowed reporters and camera crews to not only record operations and events, but to some extent experience the action themselves. Such intimacy has given the media and the public new insight into the lives and the trials of SOF personnel. The close cooperation has also provided leaders and troops with the opportunity to learn how best to work with the media and turn the attention to their advantage.

In January and February 2003, the DoD issued Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) for activities in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR), which became the basis for all other PAGs in OIF. In contrast to the fairly restrictive policies initially followed in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the DoD guidance for OIF seemed to go out of its way to accommodate media interest: “The Department of Defense (DoD) policy on media coverage of future military operations is that media will have long-term, minimally restrictive access to U.S. air, ground and naval forces through embedding.”¹

The same PAG spelled out the rationale behind the DoD’s new openness and seemingly newfound realization that publicity

was an effective tool of national security: “Media coverage of any future operation will, to a large extent, shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead. This holds true for the U.S. public; the public in allied countries whose opinion can affect the durability of our coalition; and publics in countries where we conduct operations, whose perceptions of us can affect the cost and duration of our involvement.” The PAG also revealed an attitude that bordered on “if you can’t beat them, join them”: “We need to tell the factual story—good or bad—before others seed the media with disinformation and distortions, as they most certainly will continue to do.”²

While special operations forces were included in the DoD policy, the special circumstances of their missions did allow for variations in application of the embedding plan. As public affairs officer (PAO) Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) Kevin Aandahl prepared the PAG for Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT), he was able to negotiate with the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Victoria Clarke, to ensure that reasonable compromises between SOF concerns and the embedding directive could be reached. The most important concession was that media embedded with SOF would not be indefinitely placed with troops, but would be assigned on a mission-by-mission basis.

This policy would still provide for media access during pivotal operations, but would also allow SOF commanders to maintain crucial control over operations and security.³

In keeping with SOF's special status, and the high-profile nature of SOF participation in recent operations, SOCCENT was able to request and get specific reporters from the media pool, even though the DoD embedding plan assigned slots to media organizations and not to individuals. SOF embeds were chosen with such factors in mind as seniority, past work with SOF, physical fitness, and readiness to travel.

Among those reporters chosen to embed with SOCCENT were Kelly O'Donnell from MSNBC, Jonathan Ewing from Associated Press, James Dao from the *New York Times*, and Jim Sciutto and Drew Millhon from ABC News.⁴ At the height of the war, the SOCCENT PAO was responsible for coordinating eighteen embedded reporters or news teams.⁵

Even as the process for selecting media embeds proceeded relatively smoothly, LCDR Aandahl ran into problems filling out the PAO requirements for the various SOCCENT component commands. By mid-December, only two of the four component commands—the Joint Special Operations Air Component and the Naval Special Warfare Task Group—had PAOs assigned to them. Joint Special Operations Task Forces (JSOTFs) North and West both lacked PAOs, and every time an appropriate officer was identified, the request for assignment was denied. After Major (MAJ) Tim Nye spent months processing a number of such personnel actions at the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) PAO, JSOTF-West finally received a PAO and Nye himself became the JSOTF-North PAO.⁶

MAJ Nye joined the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) in Stuttgart, Germany in early February 2003. From the intermediate staging base (ISB) in Stuttgart, the 10th SFG was to move to a staging base in Turkey, but those plans were changed when Turkey objected to the U.S. using their bases in preparation for the invasion into Iraq. Romania was chosen as the alternative launch point, and the 10th SFG and attached personnel arrived

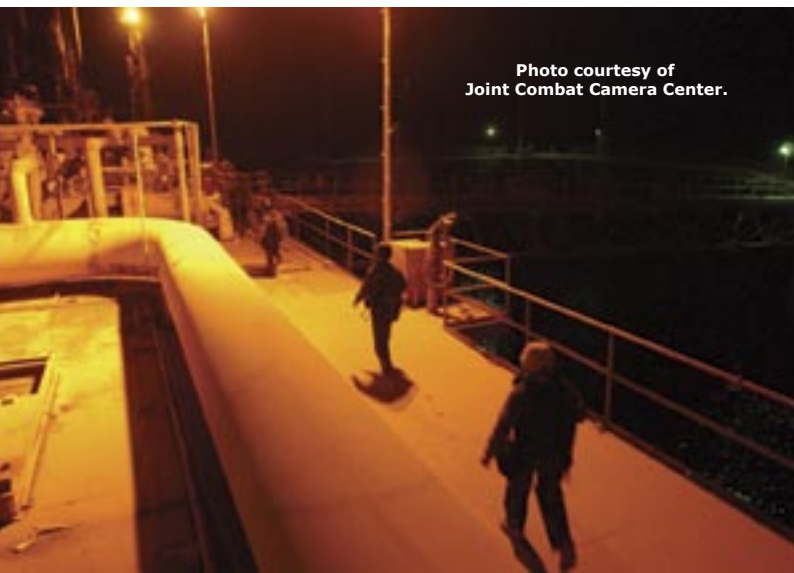


Embedded media and combat camera crews documented SOF liberation of Iraqi offshore gas and oil platforms (GOPLATS) in the early days of OIF. Night vision goggles enabled coalition soldiers to approach their objectives in the dead of night.

in Constanta on 3 March 2003. While the selected media teams “embedded” with the 10th SFG in Constanta, MAJ Nye and MAJ Rob Gallen opened a Joint Information Bureau (JIB) in downtown Constanta in order to keep the non-embedded media away from the actual staging base, which needed to keep a low profile. As part of the effort to deflect attention away from the Special Forces presence, the staging base was passed off as a transit base for equipment and personnel. To sate media curiosity and redirect interest, the JIB even conducted a press conference at the “transit” base, complete with guided tour. The tour turned out to be one of the largest press events in Romania in over a decade.⁷

Back in Qatar, LCDR Aandahl continued to coordinate the various component PAOs and associated embedded media in preparation for the war. Since SOF embeds generally did not remain with a unit for an extended period of time, they found themselves waiting in Qatar for mission assignments. Aandahl and his staff went to great lengths to maintain operational security, and generally the media cooperated with the procedures. Many continued to question the PAO, trying to ferret out details of their prospective assignments, but they also entered the spirit of the “game” created by security requirements. Reporters and media crews enjoyed receiving mission instructions that seemed to be taken from a spy novel. Such directions as “You will be met by a man in the lobby of your hotel...” and “Fly to Bucharest...” were met with amusement and occasionally astonishment: “That’s in Romania!”

The first opportunity for Aandahl's team to prove how well media embeds could work for SOF came on 21 March 2003, when representatives from Fox News and *The New York Times* arrived on location just hours after special operations personnel liberated several gas and oil platforms (GOPLATS) off the Iraqi coast. The reporters and camera teams captured the military and environmental significance of the operation, and were prepared to release the story immediately. While the approval process had been streamlined since OEF and all footage and copy had been cleared for release, this particular story was delayed by General Tommy R.



Navy SEALs secured offshore drilling facilities in the predawn hours of 21 March 2003. Positive media coverage of the GOPLATS mission proved the value of the embed program and provided a model for SOF-media cooperation throughout OIF.

Franks, CENTCOM commander, who wanted to wait until all platforms had been secured before releasing details. The delay came to the attention of General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and in the Defense Department briefing on 21 March, he settled the issue by announcing in reference to the platform operations that “there were embedded media with the SEALs, and their reports should be out shortly.” With that statement, SOCCENT PAO received permission from CENTCOM to release the stories, along with combat camera images recorded during the operation.⁸

With the infiltration of 10th SFG into northern Iraq, the JSOTF-North PAO found himself on the frontlines of military-media relations. MAJ Nye escorted an ABC News television crew as they accompanied 10th SFG

on a joint offensive with Kurdish *Peshmergas* (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan—PUK) against Ansar al-Islam forces in and around the city of Halabjah. The news crew primarily remained on the hilltops surrounding the valley of Halabjah, interviewing soldiers at their observation posts in the SF teams’ few quiet moments between receiving hostile fire and calling in air strikes on the enemy below. As the soldiers saw that the media was obeying the PAG and were not going to break security by filming them from the front or revealing their full names, soldiers accepted the news crew and even began to volunteer their own stories.⁹

At the conclusion of the battle, a PUK commander scheduled a press conference in Halabjah. In order to maintain control of the situation, Nye organized the event and 3rd Battalion, 10th SFG commander Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Kenneth Tovo presided. While it was unusual for SF ground commanders to participate in press events, the Halabjah conference provided LTC Tovo with the opportunity to officially state what had and had not happened during the battle. With PAO coaching, Tovo carefully explained that Task Force Viking was only in the area to support PUK forces, and that while troops had secured a suspected chemical weapons facility, the scientists were still evaluating the site and no conclusion had been made regarding the presence of weapons of mass destruction. In cooperating with the press instead of stonewalling them, SF mitigated the possibly negative effects of the inevitable publicity given the operation.

An unexpected side effect of the success of the embed program was that unembedded media sometimes became unofficially embedded with SOF units. One reporter embedded himself with the Kurds, which made him *de facto* embedded with the SF troops fighting in Halabjah. MAJ Nye directed the soldiers to continue to follow the PAG for media interaction, and in the end the reporter produced such SF-favorable articles that the troops treated him as an official embed and allowed him the same access as the PAO-assigned news crews. Safety issues also created relationships where there had been none, as happened in Mosul. Soon after the Halabjah operation, MAJ Nye joined 2nd Battalion, 10th SFG in rendezvousing with their commander, LTC Robert Waltemeyer at the airfield on the edge of Mosul. As Nye entered the terminal building to meet with the commander, he was shocked to see large numbers of reporters colocated with the troops. Waltemeyer had offered the media shelter from the bombardment, effectively

embedding them all with his battalion in the process.

LTC Waltemeyer's actions that day, and for the rest of the week, gave further evidence of the more congenial relationship that had developed between SOF and the media. MAJ Nye arrived in Mosul to find that LTC Waltemeyer and COL Charlie Cleveland, 10th SFG commander, had already scheduled a press conference for that day (and Nye was expected to run it). In an effort to stop violence between the Kurds and the Arabs, the SF commanders used the high profile conference to announce that 2nd Battalion was in control of Mosul and all warring factions would ultimately answer to them. Waltemeyer continued to hold daily press conferences and personal interviews, indicating that he was not only at peace with the media, but welcomed it as a vital aspect of governance.

Less than a month after the war began, SOF had proven that they were not only willing to cooperate with the media, but welcomed the presence of embedded news teams on selected missions. The Department of Defense's directive that the military would accept media embeds was carried out both by military leaders and at the individual troop level, making the embed program a success within the SOF community. From MAJ Nye's perspective as a PAO responsible for making the embed program work, the SOF soldiers carried out the embed program "in a very professional manner. They understood the importance of it, they

understood the mission, and they never tried to impede it." The result has been better media coverage and greater public understanding of SOF's role in military operations, a situation that benefits all involved. ▲

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COL Charles Cleveland and LTC Robert Waltemeyer met with local leaders and press shortly after soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 10th SFG entered Mosul. SOF officers not only cooperated with media during OIF, but also learned to capitalize on its presence.



Reaching Out:

Psychological Operations in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM



by Cherilyn A. Walley and Michael R. Mullins

PSYCHOLOGICAL Operations (PSYOP) is potentially one of the most powerful tools the military possesses. Conveyed to foreign audiences in a variety of ways, PSYOP messages support U.S. goals and objectives, whether they be offensive, defensive, or peaceful in nature. Properly applied, PSYOP



The Special Operations Media System-B (SOMS-B) consists of a Mobile Radio Broadcast System (MRBS) and a Mobile Television Broadcast System (MTBS). With the SOMS-B, the 4th Psychological Operations Group is able to broadcast messages on AM, FM, and short wave radio bands, as well as television signals.

can wear down an enemy's resolve to fight, diffuse a tense standoff between would-be attackers and U.S. troops, and ensure fair distribution of humanitarian aid. PSYOP activities leading up to and during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) used a number of means

to deliver coalition messages to the Iraqi military and the civilian population. Two of the more notable methods of distribution were radio and television broadcasts of coalition programming and leaflet drops.

A large part of the PSYOP in OIF activities consisted of media broadcasts directed at the Iraqi people, both military and civilian. Both the Special Operations Media System-Broadcast (SOMS-B) and the EC-130E Commando Solo proved to be capable and valuable broadcast platforms. Working independently and in concert, the SOMS-B and Commando Solo teams successfully delivered their messages to critical audiences throughout Iraq.

The SOMS-B consists of two primary subsystems: the Mobile Radio Broadcast System (MRBS) and the Mobile Television Broadcast System (MTBS). Between the two subsystems, the SOMS-B can broadcast via AM, FM, and short wave radio, as well as television. The Joint PSYOP Task Force made up of elements of the 4th PSYOP Group initially set up a SOMS-B in Kuwait in mid-December 2002 and immediately began to broadcast messages throughout southern Iraq. In the beginning the SOMS-B unit broadcast radio messages for five hours a day, but by February transmission times had extended to eighteen hours every day. When combat operations began on 19 March, the SOMS-B broadcasts provided PSYOP support twenty-four hours a day.¹

CPT Robert Curris, the commander of the SOMS-B element, requested additional SOMS-B equipment be brought into theater to supplement his unit's capability. The new unit, a SOMS-B "light" comprised of just the MRBS, accompanied 3rd Infantry Division north to Baghdad. A third SOMS-B arrived from Romania and began broadcasting from Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). With three systems established between



The EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft has the ability to broadcast on commercial AM/FM and short wave radio bands, VHF/UHF television bands, and military VHF/HF/FM frequencies. Such versatility allows the Air Force National Guard 193rd Special Operations Wing, based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to distribute psychological operations messages over vast areas.

Kuwait and Baghdad, combined with daily Commando Solo broadcasts, almost all of Iraq had access to coalition messages via AM, FM, and short wave radio.²

The EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft also played a significant role in broadcasting PSYOP messages. Based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Air Force National Guard's 193rd Special Operations Wing (SOW) is home to the Commando Solo Aircraft and is tasked with providing aerial transmission of PSYOP messages. The Commando Solo platform can broadcast on the commercial AM/FM and short wave radio bands, VHF/UHF television bands, and military VHF/HF/FM frequencies. Having such comprehensive broadcast capabilities in an aircraft enables the 193rd SOW to support military operations worldwide. As the 193rd SOW is the only unit in the Air Force dedicated to this mission, the Commando Solo crews truly do support global operations, and OIF was no exception.³

A detachment of the 193rd SOW, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol) Geral Otterbein, arrived in the region on 24 March 2003. The detachment consisted of one EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft, two full EC-130E crews of eleven people each, two support C-130s, and associated staff and support personnel. The Commando Solo detachment brought into theater aerial television transmission, AM/FM/HF radio broadcast, and "net intrusion" (military radio net interruption) capability, all of which allowed wider distribution of PSYOP messages.⁴

The 193rd SOW detachment was fully operational within forty-eight hours of arriving in theater. Under the tactical control of the Joint PSYOP Task Force (JPOTF) in Qatar, the detachment was given areas to

target with the television and radio broadcast tapes that the Commando Solo crews received from the 4th PSYOP Group at Fort Bragg. The Army PSYOP liaison attached to the 193rd SOW, Sergeant (SGT) Dennis Relyea, reviewed the taskings and planned and coordinated all broadcast plans with the detachment's Operations Officer, LtCol Kevin Satow.⁵

Flight planning proved to be a delicate undertaking. The 193rd SOW initially flew missions outside Iraqi airspace, but still close enough that it could transmit to the majority of western Iraq. The JPOTF urged LtCol Otterbein to broadcast to cities north of the Euphrates River, which would require flying over western Iraq, making the aircraft vulnerable to attack. The EC-130E mission called for it to orbit in "tracks" for long periods of time. The EC-130E is also an extraordinarily heavy aircraft, lacking the maneuverability necessary to react quickly to threats. While transmitting, the aircraft also normally trails a four hundred-foot long wire antenna that is invisible at night, which further reduces maneuverability. Major (Maj) David Redclay, an aircraft commander in the 193rd, explained that with the antenna deployed, the aircraft "can make one reaction from a threat. If there's a follow on, second one, you're going to the guillotine the aircraft or cut the wire and then our AM broadcasts are done." Further risk lay in the fact that the aircraft's APR-47 missile warning system was inoperative. In short, the 193rd SOW would not conduct flights over hostile areas until the Joint Special Operations Air Detach-



During the early days of OIF, Commando Solo crews flew broadcast-intense missions over Iraq. Besides radio broadcasts, the EC-130E transmitted such television programs as "Towards Freedom TV" in support of coalition goals.

Translated excerpt of a Commando Solo broadcast:

People of Iraq. The standard of living for Iraqis has dropped drastically since Saddam came into power. Every night, children go to sleep hungry in Iraq. The sick suffer from ailments that are easily treatable in the rest of the world.

Saddam has built palace after palace for himself and has purchased a fleet of luxury cars—all at the expense of the Iraqi people. This money would be much better suited to build libraries and schools. This money would have gone a long way to provide better food and medicine for the people of Iraq. The amount of money Saddam spends on himself in one

day would be more than enough to feed a family for a year.

The Oil for Food program was set up by the UN to provide relief aid to Iraqis who had fallen into poverty due to Saddam's leadership. Only 25 billion dollars out of the available 53 billion were ever applied for. Much of the food and equipment purchased under the Oil for Food program was stored away in warehouses, never to reach their destinations. Saddam illegally resold much of this equipment for his own profit. Saddam has exploited the Oil for Food program to illegally buy weapons and materials intended

to produce nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and for lavish gifts for his elite regime members.

The countless pictures and billboards of Saddam that litter the landscape of Iraq do nothing to help the people of Iraq. Saddam has built monuments to promote his legacy at your expense. These lavish monuments serve as a constant reminder to the Iraqi people of money that would have been better spent on the welfare of the Iraqi people.

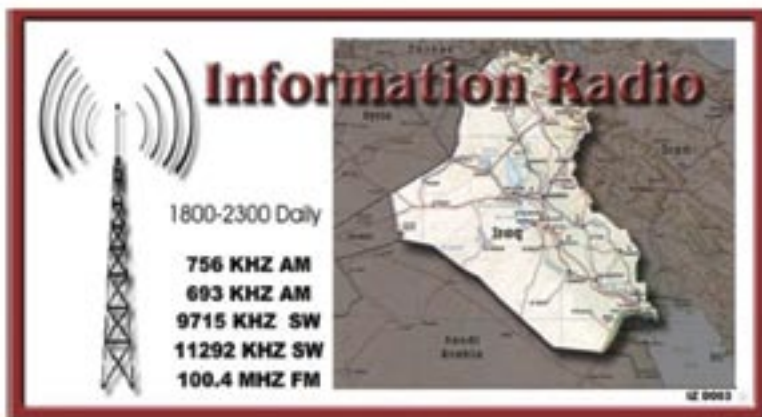
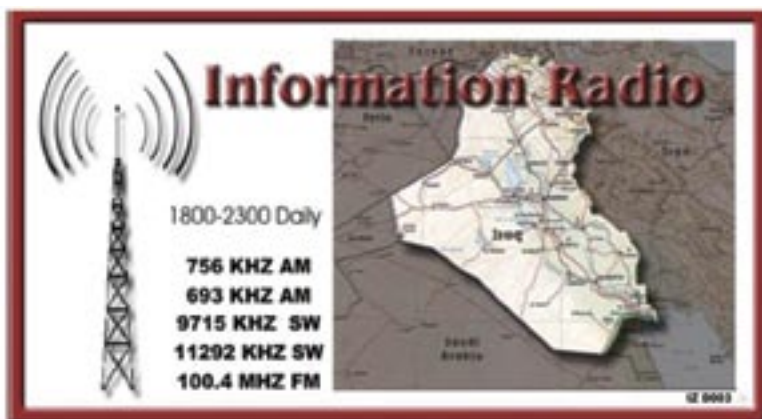
How much longer will this corrupt rule be allowed to exploit and oppress the Iraqi people?

ment (JSOAD) and 193rd SOW detachment intelligence officers decided the threat was at an acceptable level.⁶

With clearance from the JSOAD, the detachment advanced operations to an area north of the Euphrates River in the first week in April. The JPOTF added television broadcasts to the unit's mission the following

week, giving the EC-130E crews more responsibility than usual. One of the first broadcasts from the new coalition television service called "Towards Freedom TV" included an interview with opposition group members, information on humanitarian aid deliveries, and a feature on Iraqi culture and arts. Another

Leaflets advertising "Information Radio" comprised an important part of the multimedia campaign to promote coalition-sponsored radio programming to the Iraqi people.



contained a joint message from George Bush and Tony Blair to the Iraqi people. The programming was outsourced to World Television, a production company in Iraq, which transmitted the programming by satellite daily to the 4th PSYOP Group at Fort Bragg for approval and distribution. Once approved, 4th PSYOP Group transmitted the program by satellite to Qatar, where it was transferred to videotape for broadcast from both the EC-130E Commando Solo and SOMS-B units.

Of the increase in the EC-130E's workload, MAJ Red-clay observed, "I've never run this many frequencies and missions out of the back end as an aircraft commander... Usually it's two tasks, and a third one if you get around to it." Despite the pressure of extended missions over Iraq, the members of the 193rd SOW detachment remained focused. LtCol Otterbein stated, "We're aware of the impact we have on the theater battle... If we get one person to put his gun down and surrender, think about how many Americans that might have saved."⁷

The 4th PSYOP Group turned to the air for more than electronic broadcasts; it also made liberal use of leaflet airdrops to spread important PSYOP messages. Between 12 December 2002 and 18 March 2003, U.S. forces dropped over twenty million PSYOP leaflets into Iraq. By mid-April the total exceeded forty million. The 4th PSYOP Group, who orchestrated the entire PSYOP effort of the war, designed the leaflets and delivered them to U.S. Navy aircraft carriers by computer, where they were printed and packed in canisters typically holding sixty thousand leaflets each. Naval F-18s stationed aboard aircraft carriers, including the USS *Harry S. Truman*, USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, and USS *Constellation*, then dropped the leaflet bombs in targeted areas throughout Iraq.⁸

The Army performed its share of leaflet drops, as well, giving deployed PSYOP personnel an opportunity to participate in the air distribution end of the PSYOP campaign. Between 14 and 23 April 2003, C Company, 9th PSYOP Battalion, conducted over ten static-line leaflet box drop missions over Baghdad in support of 3rd Infantry Division. The missions were typically conducted with blacked out UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters flying at approximately 3000 to 5000 feet above ground level, carrying two drop boxes containing fifty thousand leaflets each. The first two missions over Baghdad were carried out by SGT Lizabeth Lee and Corporal Jennifer Salkiewicz, both from the Product Development Team, C Company, 9th PSYOP Battalion. The PSYOP personnel on board each helicopter took into account wind direction and velocity, the size and weight of the leaflets, and the altitude the boxes were being dropped

from in order to compute wind drift. With accurate calculation, the drops delivered the necessary density of leaflets over the targeted areas within the city.⁹

One of the more successful leaflet efforts orchestrated by the 4th PSYOP Group addressed the need to protect Iraq's petroleum production and processing facilities. Leaflets urged Iraqi citizens and soldiers to remember that oil was a vital part of the nation's



UH-60 Black Hawks were used for early static line leaflet drops over Baghdad. SGT Lizabeth Lee and CPL Jennifer Salkiewicz of C Company, 9th Psychological Operations Battalion conducted two such missions in mid-April 2003.

economy, and the destruction of the oil infrastructure would negatively impact their families. The combination of the PSYOP leaflet program and the advancement of combat operations is credited with preventing Iraqi forces from perpetrating the kind of environmental devastation that was committed in 1991, when they set oil fields ablaze in Kuwait.¹⁰

Major General Victor E. Renuart, CENTCOM Director of Operations, discussed the PSYOP impact in his 10 April 2003 Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Briefing: "We mentioned the 40-some-odd million leaflets. And the people have said, 'Well, so what do they really do for you?' Well, let me give you an example. As we were going back into the oil fields with the U.K. engineers, U.S. engineers, Kuwaiti engineers, and returning the Iraqi oil workers back to the sites, we were interview-

ing the staff of the Iraqi oil industry. We noticed that many of these wells had, in fact, been wired to be destroyed. And we also noticed that many of them, even though there were explosives set in place, had the valves turned off, so that, even if you had an explosion, it wouldn't necessarily damage the oil well. And we said, 'You all were here. You watched this happen. How did they do this?' And they said, 'We read your leaflets. We heard your broadcasts. We understand that keeping the oil infrastructure was important to our future. And so while we complied for our own protection with the regime, we ensured that true damage to the oil fields would not occur.'" ¹¹

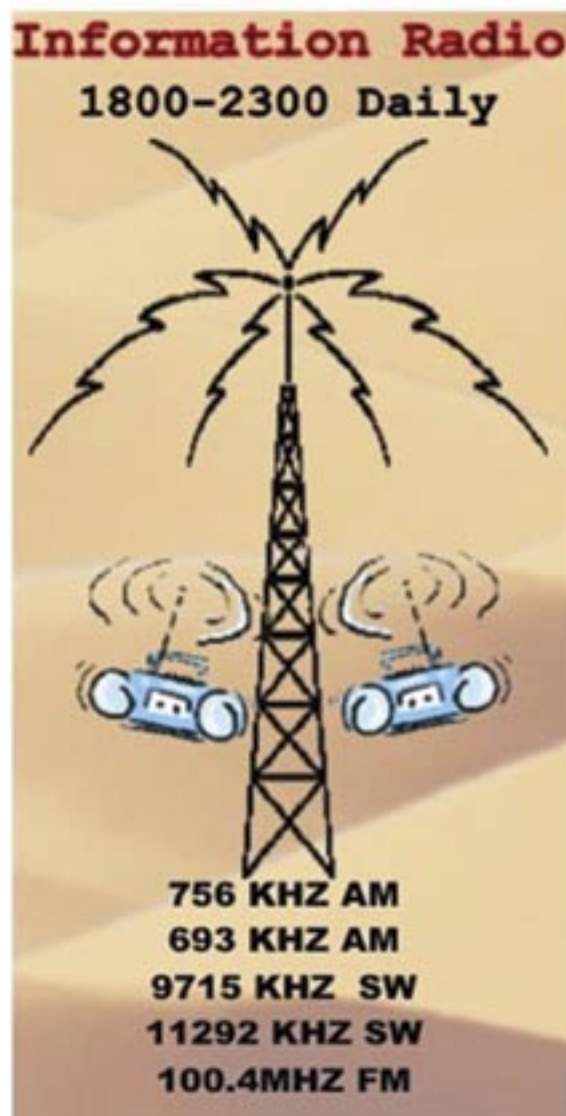
The 4th PSYOP Group seldom used only one method of disseminating PSYOP messages. Radio and television broadcasts were coordinated with leaflet drops as often as possible, in order to reach the maximum number of people and reinforce the messages. The PSYOP efforts surrounding the coalition's "Information Radio" program is a prime example of broadcast-leaflet coordination. While the radio programs were obviously a broadcast media distributed by SOMS-B and from the EC-130E Commando Solo broadcast platform, leaflet drops were used to advertise the programming and encourage Iraqis to tune into Information Radio for accurate and pertinent news.¹²

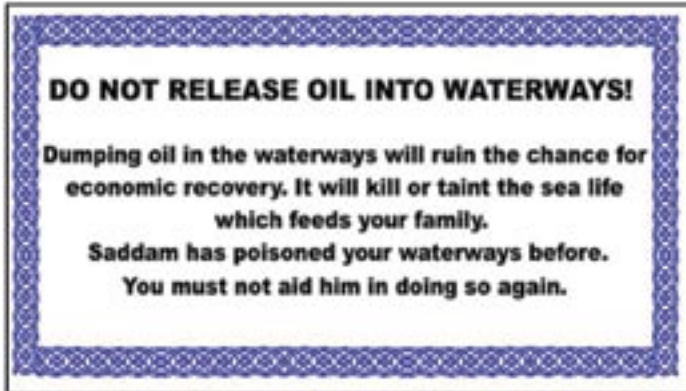
Under the direction of 4th PSYOP Group at Fort Bragg, PSYOP efforts in OIF took many forms and met many needs in the early days of the war. Whether urging cooperation with coalition forces or providing much needed information about the new government, PSYOP messages advanced the coalition's cause and saved lives. The close cooperation of all branches of the U.S. military allowed for the widest possible distribution of PSYOP messages. Coordination of diverse media—from radio and television to printed leaflets—reinforced important messages and helped the messages reach diverse segments of the population. PSYOP still plays an important part in the stabilization and rebuilding efforts going on in Iraq today, and will continue to be a vital component of U.S. military strategy in years to come. ▲

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Endnotes

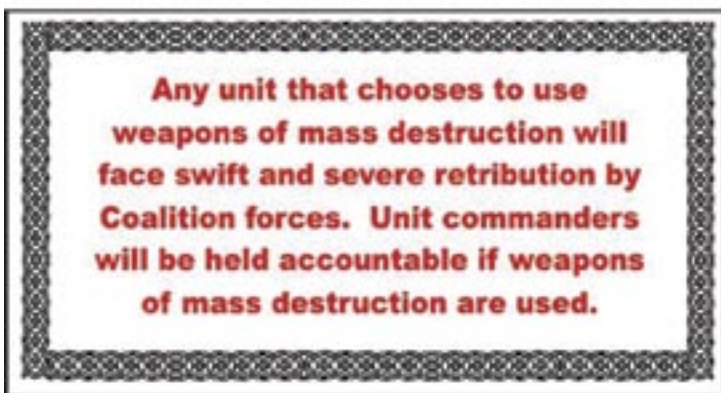
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- 4 Lieutenant Colonel Michael Schellhammer, "Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Joint Special Operations Area-West," 9, USSOCOM History Office Classified Files, MacDill Air Force Base, FL.
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The 4th Psychological Operations Group produced leaflets urging Iraqis to preserve their oil resources by not sabotaging pipelines or refineries. By all accounts, the leaflets were instrumental in preventing widespread destruction of the oil infrastructure.

While usually informative and designed to encourage positive behavior, some leaflets deliberately targeted enemy troops and warned them against hostile action toward coalition forces.



Getting the Message Out:

Tactical PSYOP in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

by Robert W. Jones, Jr.



While under heavy enemy fire, the TPT maintained contact with the task force commander in order to get the loudspeaker team into the fight.

TACTICAL Psychological Operations (PSYOP) supported the full spectrum of the force during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Both active and reserve component units supported special operations forces and Army and Marines conventional forces. The 9th Psychological Operations Battalion, reinforced with several Army Reserve PSYOP companies, provided support to both the Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC) and Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC). The battalion headquarters also formed a V Corps PSYOP Support Element (CPSE) under the control of the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Glenn Ayers.

Tactical PSYOP companies, including those of the 9th PSYOP Battalion, provided support to both conventional and special operations units across Iraq. Alpha Company supported Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF)-North and 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) in northern Iraq, while B Company, augmented with Reservists from the 301st PSYOP Company, supported CJSOTF-West and 5th SFG in central and western Iraq. Charlie Company supported the 3rd Infantry Division and provided a detachment to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF). The 315th PSYOP Company replaced C Company and assumed responsibility for Baghdad in June 2003. Even with the detachment from the

9th PSYOP Battalion, the majority of PSYOP support for the 1st MEF—comprised of 1st Marine Division, Task Force Tarawa, and the 1st United Kingdom Armored Division—came from the 305th PSYOP Company. Rounding out the tactical PSYOP picture, the 318th PSYOP Company provided support the 101st Airborne Division.

Tactical PSYOP companies and teams all had similar missions and shared common experiences. The following vignettes highlight some of those common experiences, and a few not-so-common adventures, during the early months of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

Fighting Bullets With Words

Junior noncommissioned officers operating independently from their detachments and company elements accomplished the majority of the work conducted by Tactical PSYOP Teams (TPTs). In many cases, these sergeant-filled TPTs supported conventional armored units, as did TPT 1092, an Army Reserve element from the 318th Tactical PSYOP Company out of St. Louis, Missouri.

During a battle at a grain warehouse west of Al-Hillah, TPT 1092—Sergeant (SGT) Bryant Pilant, SGT Shawn McCauley, and SGT Jeremy Corcoran—supported the 101st Airborne Division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team. While under heavy enemy fire, the TPT maintained contact with the task force commander in order to get the loudspeaker team

into the fight. In order to broadcast surrender appeals to the enemy over the noise created by the intense weapons fire and supporting OH-58D helicopters, the team moved its vehicle to the front gate, and at times inside the perimeter, of the grain warehouse occupied by enemy forces. With machine gun and rifle rounds impacting all around, TPT 1092 completed their mission and continued to broadcast. SGT Pilant assumed a dismounted fighting position alongside the team vehicle and returned fire in order to allow SGT McCauley to employ the loudspeaker system. SGT McCauley maintained his position in the exposed gunner's hatch throughout the entire engagement. TPT 1092's only casualty from the battle was their vehicle's water pump, which had to be replaced.

Besides responding to fire with words, TPT 1092 found themselves fulfilling a number of other missions in support of the 101st Airborne. In one case, the TPT contributed to the capture of several members of a Syrian mercenary death squad by broadcasting extremely effective surrender appeals.



As members of TPT 1092, SGTs Corcoran (left), Pilant (right), and McCauley (not shown) took their loudspeaker vehicle into the thick of battle in order to broadcast surrender appeals to the enemy.



TPT 983 members SPC Buryl Ewing, SGT Joseph Tetreault, and PFC Justin Warden used their loudspeaker vehicle in support of a 2-69th Armor mission to destroy a weapons cache in the Al Kazimiyah area of Baghdad. The simple mission turned complicated when the column was ambushed by insurgents.

Having the only interpreter in the task force, the TPT also actively gathered information from local civilians, Iraqi prisoners of war, and captured Syrian mercenaries.¹ TPT 1092 truly represented the tactical flexibility of tactical PSYOP.

More Tactical Than PSYOP

TPT 983 of C Company, 9th PSYOP Battalion also found itself in several tense situations while performing tactical PSYOP missions. Along with several other teams, TPT 983 supported 3rd Infantry Division. They conducted a variety of missions, usually near the forefront of operations. One such mission brought more excitement than the PSYOP soldiers expected.

At 2100 hours on 10 April 2003, TPT 983 supported 2-69th Armor in a mission to destroy a large weapons cache located in the Al Kazimiyah area of Baghdad. The PSYOP team—SGT Joseph Tetreault, Specialist (SPC) Buryl Ewing, Private First Class (PFC) Justin Warden, and an Arabic linguist—traveled in their M1025 HMMWV Armament Carrier, behind an M1A1 tank and ahead of two M2A2 Bradley Fight-

ing Vehicles (BFVs). Moving in a tactical column, the convoy reached the weapons cache without incident. Once at the site, Captain (CPT) James, the patrol leader, tasked the TPT to broadcast a civilian noninterference message and warning messages of the upcoming explosion. TPT 983 broadcast for five minutes, and then travelled the four hundred meters to the rally point. The tank and the BFVs destroyed the weapons cache, then moved to the rally point and the column started to exit the area. The convoy had moved only a few hundred meters when an explosion occurred about fifty meters behind them. Insurgents had taken the opportunity to attack the patrol under cover of darkness.

The explosive concussion swept over TPT 983 in its M1025, rendering all four men unconscious. SGT Tetreault felt shrapnel impact his Kevlar helmet and decided it was similar to a kick in the head before he blacked out. Almost immediately, Tetreault regained consciousness to the sound of small arms fire, but found it difficult to see because of dust and debris in the air. Aim-



An explosion set by insurgents sent shrapnel into SGT Tetreault's helmet, causing him to black out. All four members of Tetreault's team experienced a short period of unconsciousness, but all recovered and escaped relatively unscathed.



During an attack by insurgents, TPT 983's M1025 HMMWV Armament Carrier loudspeaker vehicle crashed into a telephone pole. The team had to abandon the vehicle and ride back to the task force medical station on an M1A1 tank.

ing mostly by sound, SGT Tetreault returned fire and started yelling for his soldiers. As he turned to look at his driver, Tetreault noticed a large baseball-sized hole in the windshield. PFC Warden was slumped over and unresponsive in the driver's seat. As the vehicle continued to roll forward at about fifteen miles-per-hour, SGT Tetreault quickly checked on his turret gunner, only to find him missing, evidently blow out of the turret by the explosion.

With an unconscious driver at the wheel, TPT 983's M1025 collided with a telephone pole and swung around, wedging its right side in some trees on the side of the road. The impact jarred the rest of the team into consciousness, and everybody exited the left side of the vehicle. Once on the ground, SGT Tetreault took a head count and discovered that all four members of the team were, indeed, present; SPC Ewing had only been knocked into the back of the M1025, not out altogether. While the other three men took up a security position around the vehicle, SGT Tetreault attempted to gain radio contact with

the rest of the patrol. He eventually made contact with CPT James, who told him to gather up his men and equipment, abandon his position, and move towards the tank, three hundred meters down the road. Waiting until CPT James and his tank crew returned from picking up survivors from a disabled BFV, the men of TPT 983 climbed aboard the tank and rode it to the task force medical station, where they remained overnight. The trail BFV returned safely, and the disabled BFV and TPT 983's M1025 were recovered later that night.²

The above vignettes highlight just two examples of the diverse circumstances in which Tactical PSYOP Teams found themselves during the

early months of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Often operating in the heat of battle, TPTs bring the strength of PSYOP to tactical units in the field.

Endnotes

- 1 Major David Converse, "Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Field Collection Team Operational Assessment (Draft)," 45–47, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
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Tactical PSYOP teams often took a creative approach to their missions. Instead of the usual loudspeaker truck, one TPT created a loudspeaker boat to get the message out while patrolling the waterways near Baghdad.



Objective Beaver:

The Search for the Elusive Smoking Gun



by James Schroder

With its realistic and resolute training orientation, the SOF community was uniquely qualified to carry out such a high profile, and possibly high risk, mission.

ON 26 March 2003, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, together with Company B, 2nd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment and other Special Operations Forces (SOF), raided a suspected chemical and biological weapons testing facility in central Iraq. Though the results of the collected samples were not disclosed, the special operations task force duly demonstrated the “fight like you train” principle in the search for the elusive smoking gun, the evidence that would demonstrate Iraq’s mass effect weapons program. The complicated mission was an illustration of precise planning, excellent training, and synchronistic execution. Every element of the task force performed its functions, especially contingency procedures, in a manner that prevented a disastrous ending, and saved the lives of two soldiers.

The Al Qadisiyah Research Center was a suspected chemical and biological weapons research complex along the southern shore of Al Qadisiyah Reservoir, approximately twenty-five miles northwest of the town of Hadithah. The United Nations Special Commission on Iraq failed to inspect the facility during its tenure; however, an intelligence assessment indicated that it warranted an investigation. The high risk mission was the domain of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) and the SOF elements it supported—Army Rangers and other special operations

units. With its realistic and resolute training orientation, the SOF community was uniquely qualified to carry out such a high profile, and possibly high risk, mission.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CW3) Richard Hoyt (pseudonym), an MH-60K Black Hawk pilot and overall flight leader, received the assignment to plan the mission. It was a multifaceted mission requiring helicopter aerial refueling, en route linkups, precise preparatory fires, and sequenced landings, all performed in zero illumination conditions over an austere desert. Intelligence analysts predicted little organized resistance from the local populace, which led to displeased conjecture that the target was probably a “dry hole”—no evidence of weapons testing. However, military history is replete with the effects of complacency on the battlefield, and the environmental conditions can kill just as swiftly as a well aimed or errant round. Therefore, the SOF planners assumed they would encounter resistance and were confident that they would, in fact, find proof of an illegal weapons program.¹

The plan emerged as follows: four MH-60K Black Hawks (referred to as Kilos) would insert Rangers into four blocking positions (BPs) around the objective; two MH-47E Chinooks (referred to as Echoes) would infiltrate the main assault force near the designated target building; two MH-60L Defensive Armed Penetrators

(DAP) gunships, two AH-6 Little Bird gunships, and two MH-6 Little Bird sniper platforms would provide close air support around the target; and two additional Echoes would wait nearby ready to insert an immediate reaction force, or provide search and rescue if needed. The special operations task force was ready to execute within two days.²

On the night of 26 March 2003, CW4 Travis Buras (pseudonym) led the flight of MH-6 lift and AH-6 gunship helicopters to a desert landing strip (DLS) named Roadrunner. The DLS, which had been secured by the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment a few days earlier, functioned as a forward arming and refueling position (FARP) and an emergency medical evacuation transfer site for this mission, since it was only thirty-five miles from the objective. Upon landing, Buras and CW4 Brian Ellis refueled, picked up four special operations snipers for the mission, and waited until their designed departure time. Two hours after the Little Bird flight departed, CW3 Hoyt took off from the FSB with his armada of aerial refuel (AR) capable aircraft for rendezvous with an MC-130P Combat Shadow tanker. Riding in the lead Chinook, Lieutenant Colonel John Cole (pseudonym), the air mission commander (AMC) and senior ranking Night Stalker, busily monitored the sequence of events with an execution checklist, which linked events with specific code words. He was the final on-site decision maker. The conditions for the assault on Objective Beaver were on schedule.

However, the initial rendezvous with the tanker foreshadowed the events of the night. The first tanker flew past CW4 Thomas Brady (pseudonym) in the lead DAP.

This was not a good sign, because the mission was helicopter aerial refueling (HAR) dependent—it would have to be aborted if the helicopters were unable to aerial

only fifteen minutes left before H-hour (the time for the raid to occur): 2000 Zulu, or 2300 Iraq local time.³

Meanwhile, shortly after departing the HAR track, Hoyt spotted the

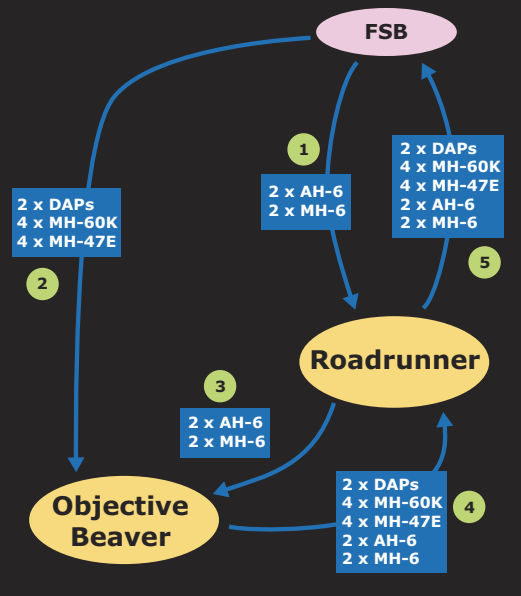


The Al Qadisiyah Research Center—also known as Objective Beaver—was the target of a 27 March 2003 raid by special operations forces. The site was a suspected chemical and biological weapons facility, a target requiring SOF's unique capabilities.

refuel. Fortunately, a second tanker moved into position, and Brady maneuvered his flight into position for fueling. During the refueling operation, Brady received a call from his colleague, CW4 Randall Ramsey (pseudonym), in a Joint Command and Control Aircraft. Ramsey informed him that a pair of A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft were delayed on another aerial refueling track, and were unable to prosecute a target. Therefore, Brady's new task was not only to cut the electricity from the power station on the city's outskirts, but also to limit any collateral damage. Once his wingman had refueled, Brady departed the tanker and raced with

flight of Little Birds on the horizon. The Little Birds had proceeded along a different route to Objective Beaver. The two separate flights conducted an often rehearsed aerial join-up without a hitch. As the Night Stalkers approached the release point—the point at which pilots cease following a designated route and freely maneuver in order to avoid potential threats—the Little Birds sped up to arrive at the target several minutes before H-hour in order to identify potential hazards or enemies. As the lights of the city partially illuminated the arriving gunships, various small groups of people rushed about on the ground or peered out windows,

Overall Concept



The concept plan for the raid on Objective Beaver called for Rangers to be inserted by MH-60K Black Hawks at blocking positions around the objective, while MH-47E Chinooks delivered the main assault force near the targeted building. MH-60L DAPs, AH-6 Little Bird gunships, and MH-6 Little Bird sniper platforms were to provide close air support during the operation.

searching for the source of whining helicopters. In the lead AH-6, CW4 James Melvin (pseudonym) and his co-pilot feverishly looked for anyone who exhibited hostile intent, the prerequisite for launching an attack. Sixty seconds later, the pair of MH-6s arrived east of the objective, looking for belligerents but primarily focusing on the targeted building. The element of surprise had passed, and the next ten minutes on the objective became the most intense for all involved.⁴

Observing from an MH-6, CW4 Ellis saw sparks from small arms fire flying off the lead Black Hawk as it landed at BP1, but he could not identify the source. Then a vehicle drove up and parked directly in front of CW3 Hoyt's helicopter. Luckily, the driver simply watched the events unfold as Army Rangers jumped from the helicopter and took up defensive positions. CW4

Melvin soon pinpointed the source of the gunfire. He immediately rolled in and fired a rocket right through the front door of the government building across the street from the landing zone (LZ). It was a spectacular close range shot and instantly eliminated the threat. As Hoyt departed, CW3 Harry Bateau (pseudonym) flew the second Kilo through a barrage of bullets half of a mile from the LZ. Sergeant (SGT) Owens, stationed at the left side window, automatically countered with his M134 minigun, sending a hail of 7.62 millimeter rounds back toward the enemy. Once they landed at BP2, Captain Todd Schultz noticed a large explosion in the distance to the south. Four kilometers southwest of the objective, Brady had just shot the first power transformer with his 30 millimeter M230 chain gun, and right behind him, CW4 Fred Hamilton (pseudonym) shot the second. Their attempts to limit collateral damage backfired, instead igniting the oil in the transformers and illuminating the previously dark sky from horizon to horizon. "It looked like a nuclear bomb went off," according to CW3 Wil-

craft. The Iraqis could now visually engage the decelerating helicopters. In spite of enemy gunfire, CW3 Peter Striker (pseudonym) managed to land the third Kilo at BP3 unscathed, though he narrowly missed a light pole with a timely rotation of the tail of the helicopter. The Rangers dismounted and raced into position as the last Black Hawk landed at BP4. Iraqi gunmen fired at the stationary helicopter, and a round entered through the cabin door, struck a Ranger in the back, exited through his chest, and then impacted his body armor. As the other Rangers leaped out the door, an accompanying Special Forces (SF) soldier's gear got hung up and he stayed behind. Sergeant First Class John Pulley (pseudonym) and the SF soldier grabbed the wounded Ranger and began first aid. Wasting no time, CW3 Troy Schupp (pseudonym) pulled pitch, rapidly departing the area and radioing Hoyt that he had a wounded Ranger aboard.⁶

The Kilos quickly formed a flight en route and proceeded directly to Roadrunner, bypassing the planned checkpoints on the egress route. In the back of a blacked-out, bouncing

Iraqi gunmen fired at the stationary helicopter, and a round entered through the cabin door, struck a Ranger in the back, exited through his chest, and then impacted his body armor.

liam Moffit, who was hovering over the objective in the lead MH-6.⁵

The resulting fire had another unintended consequence; it silhouetted the remaining inbound air-

helicopter, Pulley and SGT Jeremy Witts (pseudonym), both combat lifesaver qualified, applied a pressure dressing on the Ranger's sucking chest wound, started an intrave-

nous line of saline solution, and treated him for shock. Schupp landed the Kilo near a surgery-equipped C-130, and the crewmembers carried the Ranger to the airplane.⁷

The situation intensified as radio chatter about a casualty made its way up the chain of command. With the flight of Chinooks minutes away, CW4 Ellis restricted his flight path to a few hundred meters above a nearby hospital building. All of a sudden, a sniper aboard his aircraft calmly announced a target and dropped a gunman running toward the objective. The Little Bird was like a fifty-foot mobile deer stand.⁸ The inbound Chinooks carried the main assault force. Flying in the lead Chinook, CW3 John Foul (pseudonym) had been in this situation before, in the mountains of Afghanistan. Luck was on his side again as he flew through a salvo of gunfire to the LZ near BP3; even so, an enemy bullet struck a utility hydraulics line, which hindered aircraft control. The assault force rushed off the helicopter as soon as the ramp fell. Foul wrestled the helicopter into the air and began his egress.⁹

Responding to announcements of intermittent gun fire, CW3 Charles Adkins (pseudonym) automatically adjusted his Chinook's flight path wide to the east and landed in the same place Foul had landed his Chinook. Staff Sergeant Michael Miller, stationed at the right ramp area, turned and shouted over the din of roaring engines the one minute time warning to the assaulters. He watched in amazement as rounds passed through the Chinook, miraculously missing everybody inside. More gunfire erupted from the buildings adjacent to the landing zone, and a round struck SGT Greg Eisner (pseudonym) in the head, knocking him backwards. Miller immediately dropped the ramp, and the assaulters exited in seconds. When all personnel were clear of the ramp, aircraft commander CW3 Casey Johansson (pseudonym) grabbed the controls, lifted off, and immediately joined the lead Chinook in its flight to DLS Roadrunner.¹⁰

The flight back to Roadrunner was

fraught with tension, as CW2 Bunky Litaker and another soldier worked to save SGT Eisner's life. The wounded flight engineer was still breathing, but was unconscious and had foamy blood coming out of his mouth. Working in the dark with a red lens flashlight, Litaker located the entrance wound above Eisner's right maxilla



Four MH-60K Black Hawk helicopters delivered Rangers at designated blocking positions (BPs) around Objective Beaver. In spite of enemy fire, all of the "Kilos" completed their infiltrations successfully.

and delicately applied a pressure bandage to the area. At the half-way point of the egress, Eisner suddenly stopped breathing. Yelling above the roar of the helicopter, Litaker and the other soldier began cardiopulmonary resuscitation, kneeling on the blood-slicked floor. After five exhausting minutes, Eisner opened his eyes, spat a bit of blood, and began to breathe on his own. Landing in a dust cloud at the DLS, pilot Johansson parked one hundred meters away from the specially configured C-130 medical transport. Litaker and two other crewmembers carried a blood-soaked Eisner to the Ranger security force guarding the airplane. The soldiers transferred Eisner to a litter and the Rangers took over from there, carrying him into the C-130. In short order, the airplane departed with both Eisner and the wounded Ranger from Schupp's Kilo aboard.¹¹

With the infiltration phase completed, the ground assault force methodically searched Objective Beaver for evidence of a chemical weapons program. For protection, two concentric rings of close air support surrounded the objective area, and the Ranger blocking

positions secured main avenues of approach to the site. The AH-6 gunship pilots combed the area at a slightly higher altitude than the MH-6s, responding to Ranger calls for fire and engaging observed combatants. The gunships had destroyed most of the initial resistance, which consisted of small armed groups that had quickly formed across the street from the landing zones. After the main force infiltrated, the MH-6 pilots were free to maneuver over the target and engage enemy combatants. CW3 Moffit spotted two Iraqi gunmen running from a driveway, each closely dragging a woman for protection. As CW4 Bursa positioned his sniper closer and lower, one gunman lost his grip on the woman, and the sniper immediately killed him. The sec-

more prudent to return to the target and reluctantly disengaged. In the other MH-6, CW4 Ellis spotted a vehicle racing toward a Ranger

outbound, the driver started moving again. On the next turn, both Brady and Hamilton fired 30 millimeter rounds into the vehicle,

Coming into their landing zones, the Black Hawk pilots took note of the carnage the Rangers and their fellow Night Stalkers had wrought; dead Iraqis appeared to be everywhere.

blocking position. The Rangers unleashed a storm of heavy weapons fire, but the driver kept going. As the vehicle approached the second Ranger position, machine gun fire stopped the vehicle and two armed men ran for cover. The Rangers killed one instantly. The second gunman ran down an alley out of their sight, but well within range of a sniper's bullet from Ellis's aircraft; the man was dead within seconds.¹²

Patrolling an outer ring, the DAP pilots focused on preventing any reinforcement of the target, primarily looking for vehicular movement towards the research facility along the main north-south road through the town. The rules of engagement required that a warning shot be given to stop vehicles. If the vehicle proceeded, then it presented a hostile intent and could be attacked. During CW4 Brady's initial circuit around the objective area, a Toyota Hilux truck approached the intersection leading to the objective. Brady fired a short burst from his chain gun, but the vehicle continued. On the second pass, the driver stopped and shut off his lights as the DAPs approached. Once the flight turned

destroying it. The occupants ran for cover into a nearby building, and were never seen again. A short time later, another vehicle rapidly approached the same intersection. The two occupants stopped when given a warning shot, and dove into a ditch, only to fire at the helicopter on the next pass. Flying with Brady in the lead DAP, CW3 Walter Florenson (pseudonym) watched tracer fire blaze past his chin bubble. Brady swiftly banked the DAP into a firing position and released a barrage of bullets at the source. One gunman died in place, and the other retreated into a building, safe for another day. So it went until the call for exfiltration came.¹³

After nearly forty-five minutes on the objective, the assault team called for exfiltration. CW3 John Nailor, the second Chinook flight leader, anticipated implementing the contingency exfiltration plan while in a holding pattern at the release point. His flight of two Echoes carried the immediate reaction force and the CSAR element. By pushing the helicopter to its physical and operational limits, Nailor calculated that two Chinooks could transport the assault force. Wast-



As called for in the concept plan, flights of AH-6 gunships, MH-6 sniper platforms, and MH-60L Defensive Armed Penetrators flew close air support tracks around Objective Beaver. The air support was invaluable as enemy resistance proved to be stronger than expected.

ond gunman backed into a concrete building and held the woman tightly. Bursa decided that it was

ing little time, the Chinooks cycled in and out of the objective with all the assaulters. The Black Hawk pilots, having departed the DLS earlier, extracted the Rangers from their respective landing zones. Coming into their landing zones, the Black Hawk pilots took note of the carnage the Rangers and their fellow Night Stalkers had wrought; dead Iraqis appeared to be everywhere. Some pilots repositioned in order not to land on the dead bodies. The Rangers boarded, and Hoyt led his flight to Roadrunner, with the Little Birds and DAPs following in trail. The objective was behind them, but the operation still held surprises for the fatigued Night Stalkers.¹⁴

As the helicopter fleet landed at the DLS, the entire area became obscured by dust clouds churned up by the prop wash. Crew members and pilots could not see past the probes of the helicopters, and most stayed where they had landed. Low on fuel, Nailor led a flight of Chinooks and DAPs to the aerial refueling track, joining en route to avoid a collision during takeoff. The tanker met Nailor's flight and all went well until the DAPs moved into position for refuel. While maneuvering into refuelling position, Brady noticed that his fuel burn rate was higher than normal. Spotlighting the helicopter's probe, he saw fuel leaking. He decided to refuel anyway, and connected with the hose of the tanker. The alternative was to end up a CSAR mission. The gamble paid off as the leaking stopped when Brady disconnected after refuel. Back at the DLS, the Kilo pilots waited for the tanker to land so they could refuel with help from the FARP crew. That turned out to be a prudent decision, because a Kilo crewmember noticed that his own refueling probe had also been struck by a bullet and was leaking. The crewman affixed a temporary patch and refueled. The entire helicopter fleet finally reached the FSB two and a half hours later.¹⁵

The raid on the Al Qadisiyah Research Center proved to be a greater risk to man and machine than had been expected. Two Chinooks and three Black Hawks sustained damage from armor piercing rounds, not the type of munitions one would expect at a research center. In spite of the stiff resistance, SOF's realistic training in peacetime enabled them to complete the mission. The Night Stalkers executed several contingency

plans without a disruption of the mission; Rangers and SOAR attack pilots kept the enemy from reinforcing the objective; and two men's lives were saved by combat lifesaver-qualified crewmembers. Once again, SOF proved their worth by completing an important mission ideally suited to their unique capabilities.¹³ ↑

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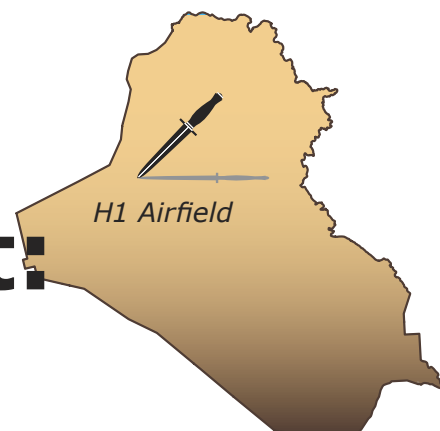
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- 1 Chief Warrant Officer 3 Richard Hoyt (pseudonym), Company C, 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles Briscoe, 11 September 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
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- 9 Chief Warrant Officer 2 Bunky Litaker, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, interview by James Schroder, 3 May 2004, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
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- 12 Ellis interview.
- 13 Brady interview.
- 14 Chief Warrant Officer 3 John Nailor, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, interview by James Schroder, 26 April 2004, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 15 Nailor, Hoyt, and Brady interview.

Two Chinooks and three Black Hawks sustained damage from armor piercing rounds, not the type of munitions one would expect at a research center.

The Jump at Objective Serpent:

3/75th Rangers in Iraq



by Robert W. Jones, Jr.

"The best thing about Rangers is that we can do anything." SSG Jack Barker (pseudonym), Squad Leader, A/3/75th Rangers

PERHAPS one of the most fearful experiences a soldier can have is to jump into enemy territory at night. Third Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, conducted two night combat parachute jumps during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) in order to seize two critical airfields in the western part of Iraq. While less publicized than the later air assault of the 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bashur Airfield, the Ranger combat jump to seize the H1 Airfield (known as Objective Serpent) provided one of the first forward operating bases deep within Iraqi territory.

The Rangers did not deploy to Iraq haphazardly. Their actions on the ground were the result of months of preparation. The training focus in the United States centered on a regimental-sized jump to seize Saddam International Airport, later renamed Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). The 75th Ranger Regiment conducted two airfield seizure rehearsals: the first on Dekkar Airstrip at Fort Benning, Georgia; and the second, Exercise Savage Strike, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in February 2003. The Fort Bragg rehearsal included practicing clearing heavy equipment from a runway, a task taught and facilitated by B Company, 27th Engineer Battalion.

In the first week of March 2003, the Rangers deployed to the Middle East. Two weeks later, A Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment (A/3/75th), received a

warning order to seize Objective Serpent (H1 Airfield). The order arrived the same day that 3rd Battalion was busy supporting C Company's jump on Objective Roadrunner, a small desert landing strip in western Iraq. A/3/75th took responsibility for the mission to take Objective Serpent and immediately went into the planning mode. Over the next few days, soldiers at all levels conducted rehearsals and made preparations for the assault.

Three C-17s full of Rangers took off in the darkness of 27 March 2003, headed for the deserts of western Iraq. The first two-thirds of the 4½-hour flight was uneventful, but approximately two hours out from the objective, the aircraft took some enemy antiaircraft fire. During the remainder of the flight, the C-17s took evasive maneuvers, "jinking" to avoid fire. Stoically enduring the bumpy ride, the Rangers began jump preparations when they felt the plane suddenly descend from 30,000 feet to 500 feet. The descent coincided with the ten minute warning to get ready to jump, which caused some problems as the Rangers attempted to stand up while struggling against the effects of gravity. Anticipation increased when the jump doors opened and filled the interior of the aircraft with cold, dry, desert air.

In the crowded troop compartment of one C-17, Staff Sergeant (SSG) Jack Barker felt that the aircraft had hardly slowed

down at all as the aircraft continued to jink. As if to confirm his observation, the Ranger standing next to Barker fell down and yelled in pain as he seriously injured his knee.¹ The grounded Ranger was moved out of the stick for the return trip to medical care. The effect on the Rangers of the rapid descent and evasive maneuvers was exacerbated by the unusual weight of their rucksacks and jump gear. In order to prepare for multiple combat contingencies, each Ranger carried approximately 280 to 350 pounds in his rucksack—everything from ammunition to extra radio batteries. Exiting the aircraft would be a relief to many. As one squad leader shuffled to the door, he observed that the anchor line cable was only two feet from the deck because of the jumpers' weight on it as they attempted to stay on their feet.²

Jumpmaster Sergeant First Class Ronald Redmond (pseudonym), 3rd Platoon Sergeant of A/3/75th, led the Rangers in his plane through the jump commands and then the Ranger Creed, a 3rd Battalion tradition carried on from their combat jumps into Panama during Operation JUST CAUSE, and later at Objective Rhino in Afghanistan during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.³ Commands reviewed and creed recited, the Rangers were ready to jump.

The jump light flashed green and the Rangers exited the aircraft without incident. As each man entered into the uncertainty of the cold, dark, Iraqi desert night, his fate depended on the wind, gravity, and, in some cases, luck. SSG Barker had just enough time to lower his rucksack before he executed a parachute landing fall. Almost immediately, he heard the telltale noise of someone landing to his right, and knew from the sound that the newcomer was hurt. After securing his gear, Barker moved toward the noise. He quickly discovered that the unlucky Ranger had blown out his knee on a patch of hard rocky sand with large jagged rocks intermittently sticking out of the ground. Barker called in the injury to the medics, and verified that the Ranger was stable and did not have any other injuries before continuing with his mission.

Barker's platoon leader, First Lieutenant David Hess (pseudonym), exited the aircraft without a problem, but hit the ground with a numbing jolt. He felt somewhat disoriented, but began to secure his equipment in what he thought was just a few minutes after landing. However, when Hess came up on the platoon's radio net, his radio operator told him it had been about twenty minutes since they'd jumped. Shaken, but not out of action, Hess rejoined his platoon.⁴



The 27 March 2003 Ranger assault on H1 Airfield provided coalition forces with a forward operating base in the deserts of western Iraq. The assault force met no resistance on the airfield, and accompanying engineers were able to use their air-dropped equipment to clear abandoned armored vehicles from the runway.

Recovering as quickly as possible from the jump, the Rangers moved quickly to their designated assembly areas. Although prepared for an enemy force on the drop zone, they noted no tracer fire or enemy activity. Even the Rangers' night vision goggles (NVGs) revealed little in the dense darkness. SSG Barker could

make out dark spots throughout the area, but no detail. Later, he discovered that these were rocks, piles of sand, or the rusted hulks of armored vehicles used to block the runway. As SSG Barker moved up the runway toward his platoon's assembly area, he noticed equipment the Iraqis had used to block the runway.

Accompanying the Rangers was a heavy drop of engineer equipment and the same engineers from B Company, 27th Engineer Battalion, who had participated in the rehearsal at Fort Bragg. The engineer equipment landed badly, so the first task for the engineers was to get their equipment into operation in order to clear the runway for the follow-on air land forces.

Although there was no enemy gunfire, the radio net was filled with status reports—mostly injuries, including several from Barker's squad. One of SSG Barker's SAW (squad automatic weapon) gunners, a former Marine named Derek, came on the radio and very calmly stated that he may have broken his ankle upon landing in a patch of jagged rocks. "Broken" was an understatement. Using the infrared light on his NVGs, SSG Barker saw that Derek had an open compound fracture just above the ankle, so severe the bones had punctured through his boot, pants, and chemical protective suit. Barker called in the casualty report to the platoon sergeant, and requested one of the "quads" (four-wheeled vehicles) that had been heavy-dropped specifically for casevac (casualty evacuation). The quad soon arrived and took Ranger Derek to the casualty control point.

Once gathered in their platoon assembly areas, the Rangers moved to their assigned objectives. In the case of 3rd Platoon, their objective was a series of bunkers that turned out to be several cement slabs that had once been used as taxiways for fighter jets. With no visible enemy threat, they moved to their final security points on the perimeter of the battle position. From their battle positions, the Rangers watched as the engineers worked feverishly to clear the runway for follow-on air land forces. Their perseverance and hard work paid off and within five hours the airstrip at H1 was operational.

The first plane to land at H1 was the casevac bird (an

MC-130). Besides Specialist Derek, A/3/75th had sustained between seven and ten other casualties, including several broken legs, feet, and a badly sprained back. As the casualties were evacuated, their sensitive items and duties were consolidated and redistributed. In the case of one squad, a team leader and the SAW gunner, the squad's two senior Rangers were evacuated. The next ranking Ranger was a private first class (PFC) nicknamed "Ozzy," a nineteen-year-old from Chino, California, who had been in the Army less than a full year. He was one of the newest soldiers in the squad,

with less than six months as a Ranger, but with a previous deployment experience to Afghanistan, where he had distinguished himself. He remained the team leader for the remainder of the tour in Iraq.⁵

Months of training and days of Rang-

er planning at home and in theater came to fruition in the early morning hours of 27 March 2003. The jump into Objective Serpent was a relatively small operation in the scope of the war in Iraq; however, it was a critical part of the overall campaign in the western desert of Iraq. H1 Airfield became a mission support site (staging area) for other operations across the western half of Iraq, including the B/3/75th assault on Hadithah Dam. 📌

The jump into Objective Serpent was a relatively small operation in the scope of the war in Iraq; however, it was a critical part of the overall campaign in the western desert of Iraq.

Endnotes

- 1 Staff Sergeant Jack Barker (pseudonym), A Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by LTC Robert W. Jones, Jr., 22 October 2003, Fort Benning GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Sergeant First Class Ronald Redmond (pseudonym), A Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by LTC Robert W. Jones, Jr., 22 October 2003, Fort Benning GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Staff Sergeant Lamont Lawson (pseudonym), A Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by LTC Robert W. Jones, Jr., 22 October 2003, Fort Benning GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Barker interview.
- 4 Captain David Hess (pseudonym), A Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by LTC Robert W. Jones, Jr., 22 October 2003, Fort Benning GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
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The Rangers Take Hadithah Dam



by James Schroder

ON 1 April 2003, B Company, 3rd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, stormed the Al-Qadisiyah (Hadithah) Dam complex northwest of Baghdad. Their mission was to prevent Saddam Hussein and his forces from destroying the dam. If the dam was breached, the resulting flood would not only impede 3rd Infantry Division's advance through the Karbala pass en route to Baghdad, but devastate the population and agricultural centers in the floodplain. However, the Rangers proved their effectiveness as a strike force by fighting and winning a fierce week-long battle to prevent any such strategic delay, or humanitarian or environmental disaster.

B Company arrived at H1, a dusty airfield in west-central Iraq, on 29 March 2003. There, they linked up with the bulk of 3rd Ranger Battalion, which had jumped in five days earlier. The new arrivals had little time for reunions, however, as they were almost immediately ordered to move out for Objective Lynx—Hadithah Dam. 3rd Battalion's mission was to draw the Iraqi Army's attention away from the dam, so that special operations forces could cross and secure the facility. At least, that was the plan.¹

On 30 March, Captain (CPT) David Doyle led B Company, and the attached section of 120 mm heavy mortars, from H1 to a remote desert landing strip (DLS) for refuel on the way to a remain-over-day (ROD) site. CPT Doyle soon figured out

that his mission was expanding by the minute, because at the DLS his company was supplemented by a platoon from C Company and attachments from 3rd Battalion's tactical operations center (TOC) II: an Air Force enlisted terminal attack controller (ETAC), a physician assistant (PA), the Command Sergeant Major (CSM), and the battalion's executive officer (XO). Once everybody was refueled and positioned, the convoy of seventeen vehicles and 140 Rangers penetrated the moonless night.

The company arrived at the ROD site just as the sun welcomed a new day. While gathering intelligence about enemy locations and troop strengths, CPT Doyle received a message from Major (MAJ) Kilburn (pseudonym), the battalion XO; at 1400, B Company had received a digitally transmitted fragmentation order to seize Hadithah Dam and prevent its destruction. Returning to the ROD site, CPT Doyle assembled his First Sergeant, MAJ Kilburn, and SFC Stanley Morgan (pseudonym), the fire support noncommissioned officer, to develop a plan. Opening his well-worn Ranger handbook on the hood of his vehicle, Doyle quickly constructed an operations order. Platoon leaders furiously took notes as Doyle laid out the plan on his map, and the group surveyed the available imagery. The time: 1730 hours.

The Rangers anticipated that the dam would be very well defended, with at least

Hadithah Dam was a key objective early in OIF. 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, was tasked with preventing its destruction by hostile forces, an act that resulted in a humanitarian and environmental disaster, and a strategic delay for coalition forces.

a platoon on Objective Lynx, and a mechanized company to the south, near Hadithah village. CPT Doyle outlined the plan: 2nd Platoon would lead the main effort, seizing a foothold on the dam and clearing the inside of the dam complex; 1st Platoon would be the supporting effort, seizing the dominating high ground to the west of the dam; and between the B Company platoons, 3rd Platoon, C Company, would clear Objective Cobalt, an area south of the dam structure comprising power station buildings and a transformer yard. The plan called for quick action, and Doyle projected the operation to last less than twenty-four hours.²

Believing they only had two hours to prepare, platoon leaders and squad leaders further defined their units' missions and disseminated the plan for coordination. While Rangers scrambled to finalize operational details, a pair of AH-6 Little Bird attack helicopters arrived at the assembly site to provide an aerial escort and close air support to the assault force. CPT Doyle briefed his plan to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) pilots and tweaked the fire support plan. After several coordination delays, the Rangers ultimately moved out at 2240, two hours later than planned. With First Lieutenant (1LT) Gra-



2nd Platoon cleared the dam's western administrative building in less than three hours. In the course of the action, the Rangers gathered intelligence assets and secured twenty-five civilian dam workers.

ham White on point, the convoy headed northeast into the night, following a route designed to avoid enemy troop concentrations. The terrain grew more treacherous as they neared the dam, with barren desert giving way to scrub-covered hills and dry wadis (gravel streambeds). The convoy lost its aerial escort when a ground vehicle's broken gearbox delayed progress to the point where the Little Birds had to divert for fuel.³



A single vehicle carrying fourteen Iraqi guards charged a 2nd Platoon squad as it crossed the dam. Several hundred .50 caliber rounds stopped the truck cold, but left nine of its occupants alive to challenge the Rangers in an hour-long firefight.

With a replacement flight of Little Birds providing reconnaissance, the Rangers breached the final barrier, racing to reach the dam before daylight broke. 1LT White and his driver, Sergeant (SGT) Thomas Corley (pseudonym), guided the formation through the narrow opening in the breached fence, and onto a raised gravel road, which precipitously dropped thirty feet down on each side. White desperately searched for the gravel road that would lead them to the dam. Then, as if in a movie, he hit it dead on: there was the gravel road, and the asphalt road two hundred meters further on. This was the cue to steel for the assault.

The Rangers rapidly reduced the distance between vehicles, and raced toward the objective at sixty kilometers per hour. As they approached the six-mile-long dam, the Rangers recognized the spillway, the dam crane, and the tall entrance towers on either side of the spillway.⁴ The dam itself was an enormous concrete structure rising more than fifteen stories above ground, and boasting six major spillways. The convoy separated and the Rangers followed the assault plan, each platoon focusing on its assigned objective.

Objective Lynx

Dividing 2nd Platoon into two elements, 1LT White led one section toward the western administrative tower, and his platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Jeffrey Duncan, led the other eastward across the causeway. The lead Rangers in Duncan's element dismounted their vehicles near the western entrance of the dam, and paused to get their bearings. Spotting two armed Iraqi guards with his night vision devices ("Nods"), lead vehicle gunner Specialist (SPC) Watson aimed his M2 .50 caliber machine gun at them.

Holding fire and calling out commands in Arabic, Staff Sergeant (SSG) James Narrow (pseudonym) and several other Rangers flex-cuffed the guards to a handrail along the road. As the section moved into blocking positions, they suddenly heard gunfire.⁵

While 1LT White was walking across the road and searching for an entrance to the western administrative buildings, he heard a Ranger shout, “He’s got a gun!” SSG Smith had observed someone dive under a piece of sheet metal, and then spotted the barrel of a weapon. Smith aimed and registered the first enemy kill of the operation. Soon after the sniper had been taken care of, two more Rangers discovered three armed and dazed guards in an apparently unmanned shack. The three Iraqis were similarly dealt with. Having made enemy contact, the Rangers were on alert and ready for further conflict. Yet, nobody exited the eastern side of the dam.⁶

Finally locating a door into the administrative building, White brought up two squads to clear the facility and search for demolitions. Using a “hooligan” tool—a combination axe and crowbar used by emergency personnel—the Rangers pried open the heavy metal door. White soon realized that clearing the administrative building would take at least three hours. The Herculean task of clearing nine floors of ten offices each, a control room, locked bathrooms, and balconies, rested solely on White’s section of approximately twenty Rangers. In true Ranger fashion, the section methodically cleared the building by kicking down doors, blowing off locks, and placing items with potential intelligence value into the hallways. The Rangers were beginning to flag from the grueling work when they made an adrenaline-producing discovery.⁷

On the sixth floor, the Rangers found twenty-five startled civilian dam workers. Energized by the encounter, the Rangers separated the dam workers into cells, photographed each man, and temporarily restrained them. The senior employee of the group expedited the search for demolitions by guiding a squad to key locations within the facility. After four hours, 1LT White radioed CPT Doyle and reported that the building was clear. Leaving a small guard detail for the workers, the rest of the Rangers moved topside, and observed that outside the building “all hell had broken loose.”⁸

SFC Duncan’s element saw little additional action until after daybreak. As the sun illuminated the surrounding terrain, sniper SSG Ronnie Jones (pseudonym) spotted Iraqis shooting rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) from the west side of the river, 990 meters away. One man stood in front of an apparent propane tank with an RPG, and the two others were standing behind the tank. SSG Narrow cleared Jones to engage, and in seconds the silent round from Jones’ rifle struck the first Iraqi, passed through his body, and hit the propane tank, which exploded and killed the other two men.⁹

Soon after the three Iraqis were taken care of, CPT Doyle directed Duncan to move his element and secure the eastern side of the dam. A quarter of the way across, a vehicle came barreling down on the Rangers. SPC Watson fired several hundred .50 caliber rounds into the vehicle, stopping it cold. Five of the armed



Objective Cobalt lay to the south of the dam, and consisted of a power station complex and transformer yard—and an antiaircraft artillery academy that had not been previously identified by intelligence sources.

Iraqi guards died instantly, and another nine piled out of the truck, taking cover behind the concrete railings along the dam. In the course of the hour-long firefight, the Rangers killed or wounded several guards, and forced five to surrender.¹⁰

During the clash, two of the wounded Iraqis jumped the concrete barrier and tried to escape down the steep embankment. CSM Alfred Birch and SFC Duncan decided that they could not leave the wounded men to die. Duncan radioed CPT Doyle, relayed the situation, and requested permission to recover the wounded Iraqis. With permission granted, Birch and Duncan sprinted down the hill, under antiaircraft artillery fire (firing in a direct fire mode) from the south. The Rangers located the guards, rendered first aid, and carried them up to the top of the dam, all while still under attack from the south. Their actions earned CSM Birch and SFC Duncan Silver Star commendations.¹¹

Objective Cobalt

While 2nd Platoon began its assault, 3rd Platoon focused on seizing Objective Cobalt, which consisted of an entry control point to the power station, the power station itself, and the transformer yard south of the earthen dam. Unable to access the area from the top of the dam, CPT Taylor directed his men to reverse course and head

back through 1st Platoon's blocking position. With 1st Squad leader SSG Jesse Ragan in the lead, three vehicles and twenty-seven Rangers maneuvered down the steep embankment into Objective Cobalt.

Through the predawn darkness, the Rangers spotted three armed individuals standing in front of a small building, seemingly just looking around. Based on their Afghanistan experience, the Rangers knew that a guy with a weapon did not actually indicate combatant status; everyone carried weapons, both militia and civilians. However, when the Iraqis shot at the lead vehicle and then dove into a bunker, the Rangers concluded that these particular armed individuals were, indeed, hostile. As CPT Brad Thompson was moving forward to the lead vehicle, team leader SSG Pete Corrigan (pseudonym) tossed a grenade and yelled, "Frag out!" The fragmentation grenade exploded, illuminating the objective and enough Iraqis to cause the platoon to pull back long enough to regroup.

Thompson quickly adjusted his attack. He directed 1st Squad to suppress the guards, while 3rd Squad flanked from the left and entered near the gatehouse. Platoon sergeant SFC Roger Sherry (pseudonym) spotted an Iraqi peeking from behind the gatehouse, but he was quickly captured. Meanwhile, the Rangers pulling rear security located a bunker with five armed Iraqis and RPG launchers. Seemingly resigned to their fate, the men simply sat there and looked at their captors impassively. The Rangers accepted the Iraqi's surrender, but left them in the bunker, unarmed and flex-cuffed; the platoon did not have the manpower or time to guard them.¹²

Having penetrated the objective, CPT Thompson called forward the vehicle that he had left on top of the dam with the TOC II element. Unfortunately, SPC Alan (pseudonym) made a wrong turn on the way down, and entered a developed area serving as an academy for antiaircraft artillery. Almost immediately, RPG and small arms fire crisscrossed over the hood of the vehicle. One round struck Alan's left foot, and then penetrated the truck's oil filter. As the vehicle retreated, leaving a trail of oil behind it, another round hit MK19 gunner Corporal (CPL) Jon Gale (pseudonym) in his body armor, knocking him backwards. SPC Alan floored the gas pedal and drove out of the kill zone on four flat tires. The bullet-riddled and oil-leaking vehicle finally died just short of 1st Platoon's position. The Rangers pushed it the final fifty meters to safety. Amazingly, Alan escaped with only a gunshot wound to his toe, and Gale was unhurt.¹³

Blocking Positions

Last in the movement order, 1st Platoon established two blocking positions across the road leading to the dam complex. Platoon sergeant SFC James Lauder (pseudonym) led a squad to the south side of the road to clear buildings. Anticipating two buildings, Lauder and his men soon discovered twelve more buildings not depicted on maps. Searching the additional structures, the Rangers found that one contained training materials for the antiaircraft

artillery school: sand tables of western Iraq, posters detailing Iraqi weapon systems, and photographs of artillery pieces.¹⁴

Hearing the attack on SPC Alan and CPL Gale to the south, SFC Lauder called his platoon leader for reinforcements. The 2nd Squad Rangers repositioned their vehicles on the north side of the road and responded to the enemy fire with MK19 grenade launchers and heavy weapons of their own. Lauder called in



The power station and transformer yard lay to the south of Hadithah Dam, where the predawn darkness initially hid aggressive guards from the Rangers' sight. Superior strategy and training enabled the Ranger squad to neutralize several guards, and take five more into custody.

Little Bird attack helicopters for additional support. After thirty intense minutes of fighting, the Night Stalkers had killed the mortar positions, and the Rangers had broken the thrust of the enemy attack.

Hard Fight Won

Soon after 1st Platoon's firefight, CPT Doyle repositioned his troops and prepared for the next phase of the once-uncomplicated mission. Doyle pulled 3rd Platoon back to the dam and positioned it between 2nd and 1st Platoons. Knowing that the Night Stalkers had stayed long beyond the protection of darkness, he released them with gratitude. By midday of the 1st, CPT Doyle felt that the Rangers effectively controlled the dam. Taking advantage of the bright daylight, he directed his platoons to concentrate on

clearing areas skipped during the frenzy of the initial assault. 1st Platoon continued working two buildings dubbed CAS 1 and CAS 2, from which the bulk of the enemy force had rallied and attacked. 2nd Platoon took the time to fortify its positions on the east side of the dam. 3rd Platoon spent the morning consolidating enemy prisoners and improving its own fighting positions.¹⁵

In the afternoon, CPT Doyle issued an order to CPT Thompson to clear the eastern half of the dam complex. Thompson took twenty men from 3rd Platoon and began the arduous task of clearing fifteen stories and over one hundred offices. The Rangers followed the same procedure as in the western building, breaking and blowing down doors, and collecting all items of potential intelligence value. Two hours later, the building was clear. Mission complete, CPT Thompson consolidated his platoon atop the dam and hunkered down for the night.¹⁶

Dawn brought new conflict on the dam. As darkness fled, the Iraqis attacked both flanks of the dam with squad-sized elements of ten to twelve men. The Rangers quickly repelled the initial assault, but, as the morning passed, indirect fire increased. A combination of mortar and 152 millimeter artillery shells rained down on the concrete surface near the Ranger positions. Fortunately, the Rangers had ample close air support, and passed the fire mission to the A-10 Thunderbolt ("Warthog") pilots. Throughout the day, the A-10s pounded the relentless enemy.

During the day, 1LT White had pushed

his squads east, out past the dam buildings. That night the enemy closed to within two hundred meters of 2nd Platoon's positions, pinning down the Rangers with RPGs. The angle of attack prevented the Rangers from returning effective fire, so they were forced to call in air support. Within minutes, an A-10 rolled in and dropped a two thousand pound bomb just three hundred meters from 2nd Platoon's location. The bomb obliterated the attackers, and shattered every window in the dam complex.

By 3 April, the enemy mortar fire attacks had declined to one round every two hours. Unfortunately, the mortars were replaced by 152 millimeter heavy artillery from the southwest. While most of the rounds fell in the lake, every platoon had a few shells fall within a kilometer of their position. One round even impacted the concrete rail only seventy-five meters from CPT Doyle's command post; luckily, it never exploded. Regrettably, another artillery round did explode, this time directly on a Ranger mortar position.¹⁷

SFC Lauder raced to the impact area with medics and his driver. Stopping short because the position was still under attack, the Rangers left their vehicle behind a three-foot concrete wall and traveled the final hundred meters on foot. The explosion had sent an artillery fragment into SPC Jeremy Feldbusch's face, penetrating the right orbital lobe. When Lauder and his team arrived, Feldbusch was not breathing and his face was turning blue. The medics removed Feldbusch's blood-covered helmet and suctioned his airway, hoping to avoid a tracheotomy. SPC Feldbusch did, indeed, resume breathing on his own, and the color returned to his face, giving everybody new hope for his survival. The medics bandaged Feldbusch's face and carried him to the truck, avoiding impacting artillery rounds all the way. Once they were loaded into their truck, Lauder and his team raced to the center of the dam, where Feldbusch would be safe until he could be evacuated for immediate surgical attention.¹⁸

The H1 TOC reacted quickly to the news of casualties on the dam, scrambling the 160th SOAR crews from their beds. In less than forty minutes, the flight of three helicopters departed H1 for the dam: an MH-47E Chinook, and two MH-60L Defensive Armed Penetrator Black Hawks. Flying in broad daylight, the flight arrived at the dam less than an hour after Feldbusch went down. The Chi-

1st Platoon established and maintained a blocking position south of the dam. While clearing the area, 1st Platoon Rangers discovered training materials for the antiaircraft artillery school.





The fifteen-story eastern half of the dam complex took two Ranger squads two hours to search. Once the buildings were cleared, 3rd Platoon used its roof as a temporary camp.

nook evacuated Feldbusch during a break in the artillery attack, and doctors began working on him as soon as he was aboard. At H1, medical personnel transferred Feldbusch to a Forward Surgical Team for emergency care.¹⁹ SPC Feldbusch eventually received a Purple Heart for his injuries, and a Bronze Star for valor.²⁰

The artillery attack seemed to be a turning point in the battle for Hadithah Dam. Over the course of the next few days, mortar and artillery fire steadily decreased. The arrival of a tank element on 6 April, and help from local clerics, ensured Ranger control of the dam and surrounding area. They secured the antiaircraft artillery academy to the south, and cleared out the cache of munitions. With all enemy combatants either under coalition control or having fled, by the end of the week the Rangers turned their attention to helping the newly arrived Civil Affairs team rehabilitate the dam.²¹

The Rangers' seizure of Hadithah Dam was crucial in the early stages of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The raid prevented a potential humanitarian and environmental disaster along the Euphrates River, and mitigated the risk to coalition forces rapidly advancing toward Baghdad. The dam's capture also prevented any further use of the facility as a river crossing by foreign terrorists, while ensuring its availability to coalition forces. Finally, the Rangers demonstrated the value that a flexible, cohesive, and highly trained assault force can bring to the modern battlefield. 📌

Endnotes

- 1 Captain David Doyle, B Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by David Jenkins, 23 October 2003, Fort Benning, GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

- 2 Ibid.
- 3 First Lieutenant Graham White, B Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones, Jr., 23 October 2003, Fort Benning, GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Staff Sergeant James Narrow (pseudonym), B Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 23 October 2003, Fort Benning, GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 Narrow and White interviews.
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- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Narrow interview.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Narrow and Doyle interviews.
- 12 Captain Brad Thompson, C Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 23 October 2003, Fort Benning, GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Sergeant First Class James Lauder (pseudonym), B Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by David Jenkins, 23 October 2003, Fort Benning, GA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 15 Doyle interview.
- 16 Thompson interview.
- 17 Doyle interview.
- 18 Lauder interview.
- 19 Captain Timothy Donald (pseudonym), A Company, 2nd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 September 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 Joyce Shannon, "Neighbors seek to help soldier injured in combat in Iraq," *Tribune-Review*, 26 May 2003.
- 21 Doyle interview.

B Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, secured Hadithah Dam after a week-long battle with Iraqi guards. The Rangers' triumph guaranteed that the dam would not be destroyed and release floodwaters into the plains to the southeast, and assured friendly forces and local inhabitants a safe place to cross the Euphrates River.



"The Beer's On Us!"

Little Bird Support at Hadithah Dam



by James Schroder

THE aviators of Company B, 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) have an established reputation for being able to deliver close air support in even the most challenging conditions. The Night Stalkers lived up to and exceeded all expectations while supporting the 75th Ranger Regiment's assault on Hadithah Dam the morning of 1 April 2003. Through well established operating procedures, the SOAR attack pilots demonstrated their value and flexibility on the battlefield.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CW4) Daniel Carter (pseudonym), his team, and their two AH-6 Little Bird attack helicopters were marking time at a dusty airfield in west-central Iraq when they received word of the mission. Having arrived at H1 five days earlier on an ostensibly overnight mission, the team looked and felt

scruffy. Carter and the rest of the team were awaiting their replacements when they received the mission to support the Rangers' occupation of Hadithah Dam. Only knowing part of the Rangers' attack plan, the SOAR crews loaded their helicopters with munitions appropriate for ground support and took off.¹

Carter's team arrived at the Rangers' assembly site on the afternoon of 31 March 2003. Captain (CPT) David Doyle greeted Carter and briefed him on the Rangers' tactical plan. The two commanders had known each other for years, and had worked together during training exercises and deployments. Together, they devised a fire support plan based on their collective experiences and standard operating procedures. With the Rangers' graphic control measures—route, checkpoints, phase lines, and assault positions—annotated on a map, Carter

AH-6 Little Bird helicopters at H1 airfield in west-central Iraq. H1 was secured by the Rangers in the early days of OIF and provided invaluable support in later operations.



traveled back to the landing site to brief his team.

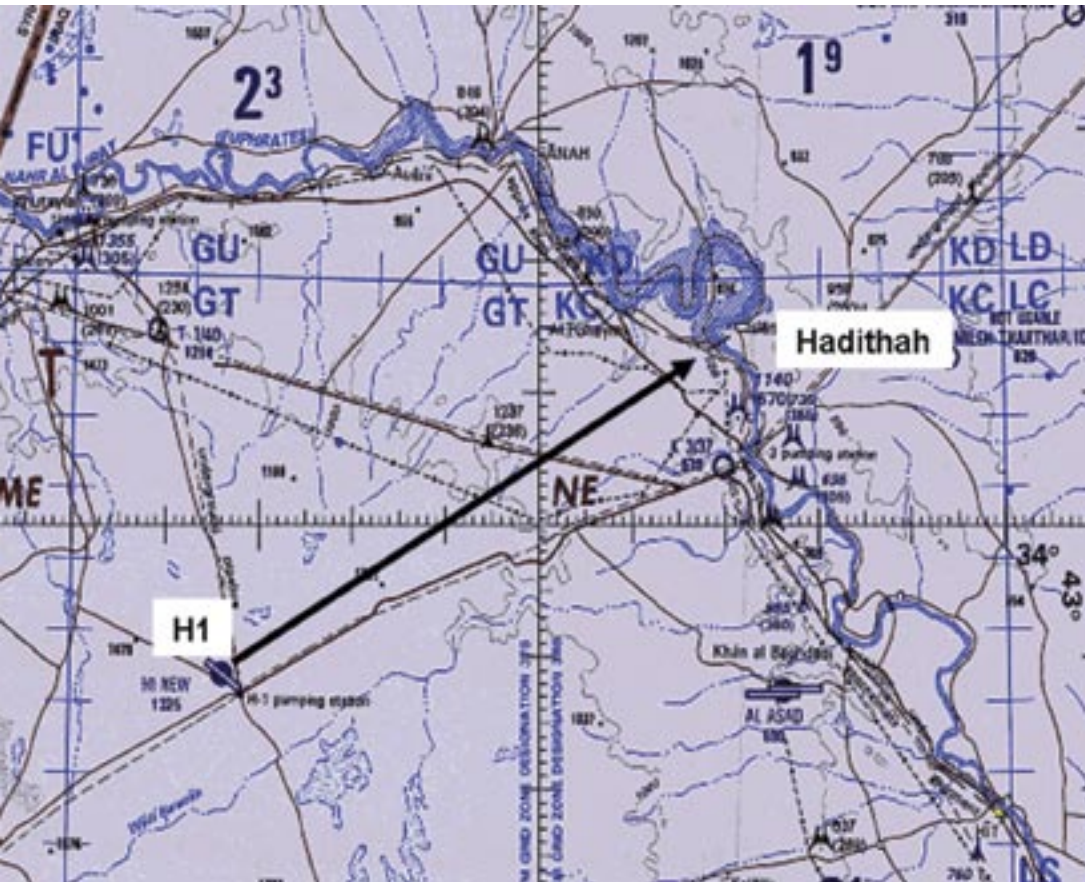
Fully expecting to execute the plan that he had developed with Doyle, Carter was dismayed when events soon orchestrated a different fate. After several delays, the Rangers ultimately launched at 2240 hours, two hours later than planned. Darkness soon enveloped the Ranger formation, and the terrain slowed the advance. The attack was further delayed when the steering gearbox failed on one of the Ground Mobility Vehicles. Resourceful mechanics had the gearbox

dington and his flight of two AH-6 gunships quickly departed from H1. Racing toward the dam, Weddington contacted Carter with his SATCOM radio and coordinated a rendezvous en route. The team met at a hidden FARP, approximately twelve kilometers west of the dam. Carter hastily conducted a battle handover to Weddington, handing to him the map with the Rangers' graphics, and providing him with the pertinent details of the assault; most were standing operating procedures.²

After the handover was completed, each flight swiftly departed in opposite directions.

CW4 Greg Coker contacted the Ranger Fire Support noncommissioned officer, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Steve Morris, for a situational report. Morris relayed the Rangers' current position, and within minutes the Night Stalker flight closed on the convoy as it reached the outer perimeter of the dam.³

From the SOAR pilots' perspective, the Rangers appeared to take the dam uncontested. The Night Stalkers flew south and reconnoitered the surrounding area as enemy forces fired sporadically at the nearly invisible helicopters. CW3 Dino Sorter (pseudonym), in the trail Little Bird, spotted a vehicle rapidly approaching from the south with its lights shining. He relayed the information to Weddington in lead, and Weddington swung his flight around for a closer look. Unsure of the intent of the occupants, the pilots waited until the combatants exited their vehicle with RPGs and



The flight of AH-6s traveled northeast from H1 toward Hadithah Dam in support of the Ranger assault. The dam prevents flooding of the land west of Baghdad, and provides electricity to the city and surrounding population centers.

repaired within thirty minutes, but the delay forced the Little Bird pilots to divert to a concealed forward arming and refueling point (FARP) for gas.

As Carter's AH-6 team provided aerial reconnaissance to the Rangers traveling toward Hadithah, another AH-6 attack team arrived at H1 airfield. Having conducted the first ever hot off-load of AH-6s from a C-17 Globemaster (meaning that the helicopters and pilots were headed directly into combat), CW4 Michael Wed-

dington and his flight of two AH-6 gunships quickly departed from H1. Racing toward the dam, Weddington launched a salvo of .50 caliber bullets into the party. Sorter followed immediately with another barrage, eliminating the threat.⁴

On the return flight north to the dam, the SOAR pilots noticed an equally deadly enemy. The massive spider web of wires and power poles emanating from the dam posed a formidable threat. As dangerous as any enemy fire, the nearly invisible high tension wires



High tension power lines present almost as much danger to low-flying helicopters as enemy bullets. During the Hadithah Dam operation, Little Bird pilots had to not only avoid hostile fire, but also maintain awareness of wire hazards and other obstacles at night.

could easily snare and destroy a helicopter. The wires were a constant reminder to maintain gun run discipline, check altitude, and not to fixate on a target.

As the enemy moved through the bottomland up the west side of the river, fifteen to twenty-foot dunes obscured its movement. The Iraqis moved into the defilade and shot at the Rangers, but the Rangers could not see them to accurately return fire. However, the Little Bird pilots could easily survey the area, and killed several fighters with 7.62mm minigun rounds and 2.75 inch rockets. After a half dozen fire missions, Coker notified Morris that they needed to return to H1 for fuel. As the flight departed the area, the pilots listened to the reports of increased enemy activity. During the nineteen minute flight to H1, mortar attacks from the south intensified.

While refueling at the FARP, Coker tuned the SATCOM radio to monitor the Ranger command net and heard an agitated, familiar voice. SFC Morris was contacting the Ranger Tactical Operations

Center (TOC) and requesting the status of the Little Birds. Coker could tell by the tone of his voice that something was wrong. As the Night Stalkers repositioned for departure, Morris called the TOC again, requesting the time inbound for the Little Birds. Coker alerted Weddington, who selected the SAT radio on his communication console, and the flight departed. Weddington radioed Morris when the flight was six minutes away. Gun fire echoed in the background.

Approximately a mile away from the objective, the Night Stalkers watched gunfire crisscrossing on the western side of the dam. 1st Platoon was fiercely engaged to its south with the same enemy fighters that the aviators had observed maneuvering through the rolling dunes along the Rangers' western flank. The pilots saw tracers and flashes from the Rangers' heavy weapons: MK19 40mm grenade machine guns and M2 .50 caliber machine guns. As Coker looked southward, two mortar tubes flashed 200 meters away. He radioed Mor-

ris and gave a situation report. Morris passed him over to the Ranger controlling fires in 1st Platoon's sector.

Suddenly, two more flashes were spotted in the same location, as well as a massing enemy force. Weddington contacted the forward observer (FO) and requested clearance to shoot. The FO began a full call-for-fire request, which is thoroughly drilled into even the greenest Rangers. Radio chatter filled the communication channels, forcing both Coker and Weddington to broadcast on all radio nets that they "had the Rangers' positions and needed clearance to shoot." Finally, Morris yelled into the radio, "Damn it, cleared hot! Cleared hot! Cleared hot!" The Little Bird pilots got the message.

The Night Stalkers separated laterally from the Rangers, and quickly rolled in on the first mortar position, delivering .50 caliber rounds and rockets into the mortar position. As Sorter's gunship discharged its rockets, the pilots in each helicopter saw muzzle flashes everywhere they looked. "Quite a sight to behold," commented Coker; "I've never seen so many muzzle flashes in my life." Five Iraqis ran into a nearby building, so the Little Birds came around for a second run and leveled the building. As the dust rose from the attack, the adept pilots divided their attention between their human and environmental adversaries, ever cognizant of the wire-ridden death trap above the mortar positions. At the second mortar position, an adjacent natural gas main erupted from the rocket effects, and burned for nearly a week. At night it could be seen from seventy miles away and served as a beacon for incoming flights.

A sizeable force began to attack the Rangers from the south. Coker identified an element maneuvering along the shoreline. Within minutes, the pair of attack helicopters fired on at least two platoons of dis-

mounted troops. As one pilot flew each helicopter, the other pilots got into the fight by leaning out the side door and engaging militia forces with their personal M4 rifles. The smell of cordite filled the air and as the Night Stalkers flew low during their attack runs, they could even hear the bolt action of the enemy's AK-47s.

The enemy force was finally suppressed just as dawn broke. With daylight comes increased probability of small arms fire hitting a helicopter, so CPT Doyle soon ordered the Little Birds to leave. As the flight departed, SFC Morris radioed the AH-6 pilots and, with appreciation evident in his voice, declared, "The beer's on us!"

The 160th SOAR pilots supported the Rangers with the ferocity that the ground fighters had come to expect. The expertise garnered through joint exercises and proven procedures enabled one team of Night Stalkers to flawlessly complete the mission began by another team. When the battle intensified, the Night Stalkers were there to deliver the precise close air support that the Rangers needed, staying on station even as the morning sun stripped away the protection afforded by the night. Years of bilateral training forged a mutual respect between these elite units, and had produced a generous return on investment with the successful seizure of Hadithah Dam. 🔴

Endnotes

- 1 Chief Warrant Officer 4 Daniel Carter (pseudonym), B Company, 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, interview by James Schroder, 17 March 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael Weddington, B Company, 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, interview by James Schroder, 16 March 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Chief Warrant Officer 4 Greg Coker, B Company, 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 10 September 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 4 Weddington and Coker interviews provided source material for remainder of article.

When the battle intensified, the Night Stalkers were there to deliver the precise close air support that the Rangers needed, staying on station even as the morning sun stripped away the protection afforded by the night.

Holding Back the Flood at Hadithah Dam



by Michael R. Mullins and Cherilyn A. Walley

ON 2 April 2003, CENTCOM Brigadier General Vincent Brooks announced that special operations forces had seized Hadithah Dam, "a very important dam that could potentially flood the Euphrates River leading down toward Baghdad, and particularly in the area of Karbala."¹ That short statement belied the significance of the dam, and barely hinted at the problems encountered within the structure itself. Though the operation that led to the dam's capture was dramatic, the struggle to keep the dam operational was just as intense and at least as dangerous.

In the early morning hours of 1 April 2003, elements of 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, assaulted and captured Al Qadisiyah Dam, or Hadithah Dam as it is commonly referred to. Measuring eight kilometers at its widest point, Hadithah Dam is the one of the largest such structures in the Middle East. The resulting Qadisiyah Reservoir has a capacity of 8.2 billion cubic meters, and is a critical source of water for irrigation and electrical power in western Iraq.² By

capturing the dam, coalition forces ensured that Iraqi forces could neither use the facility as a stronghold or destroy it and flood the valley. Seizing the Hadithah complex also protected the water supply and ability to provide electricity, both of which would be critical resources during the approaching summer months.



SFC Kevin Camp (standing at left) and the dam manager (standing at center) held numerous meetings to discuss facility operations. Once the Iraqi manager was convinced that U.S. forces were intent on preserving, not destroying, the dam, he cooperated fully.

While Rangers excel at capturing objectives, the assault force was not well suited to actually operating the dam. They quickly called for assistance from E Company, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), which had been attached to the regiment for just such an eventuality.³ Regimental commander Colonel Joseph Votel ordered Sergeant First Class (SFC) Kevin Camp, a member of Civil Affairs Team-Alpha (CAT-A) 52, to deploy to the dam on 2 April. SFC Camp had

twelve years of SF experience as an engineer, and was better qualified to emplace demolitions on a dam than to manage one, but his three months work on a dam in Virginia following his high school graduation made him the most qualified person available. SFC Camp's



The multilevel Hadithah Dam complex houses six large generators and six turbines, which provide electricity to the surrounding region

mission was to conduct a rapid assessment of the dam structure, take photographs of parts in need of repair, and return to base at H1 within twenty-four hours.

Intense Iraqi artillery barrages targeting the Rangers on the dam delayed SFC Camp's mission for two days. On 4 April, SFC Camp finally found a seat on an MH-47 Chinook loaded to capacity with personnel and supplies. The helicopter arrived at the dam late that evening, during a break in the mortar and artillery attacks. Camp wasted no time in starting his assessment, and immediately began making his way through the honeycomb-like levels of the dam, identifying significant electrical and structural problems within the facility. In the course of his assessment, SFC Camp discovered that the dam's situation was more critical than he'd originally been told. A transformer had been hit by enemy mortar or artillery fire, and it had back fed into the dam and shut down power. By the morning of the fifth, only one of the six generators had been repaired, and five of the six turbines were down for maintenance or lack of spare parts.

When SFC Camp conducted his first meeting with the Iraqi dam manager to get his appraisal of the condition of the facility and the status of the dam workers, Camp found that the manager was reluctant to share information: "Keep in mind, the manager and all the dam workers had been held in a secure section of the dam for nearly one week. The dam workers, at that time approximately twenty-five personnel broken into

two shifts, were escorted by guards whenever they moved about the complex and were then returned to one of the two worker rooms where they were kept."

Following his initial discussions with the dam manager and his assistant, SFC Camp determined his top priorities were to organize the dam employees in order to ensure the continuous operation of the facility and to repair critically damaged components. Though Camp was scheduled to return to H1 the next day, the Ranger company commander on site informed him that no aircraft were scheduled to arrive in the next twenty-four hours. Stranded at the dam, SFC Camp used the time to develop a more detailed appraisal of the problems found throughout the dam facility, including those involving the dam personnel.

In the course of working with the dam manager and his deputy, SFC Camp concluded that many of the dam workers believed that U.S. forces would destroy the dam, not preserve it. Camp worked to improve his relationship with the manager and help him understand that they were there to help repair the hydroelectric facility and return it to normal operations. SFC Camp also permitted the dam manager and eight higher level workers to listen to the radio on a regular basis. "This worked in our favor in getting the dam workers to completely understand the Americans were in charge." Through the radio broadcasts, the employees learned that U.S. forces had captured Baghdad, and began to believe that the coalition forces were

there to stay. As word spread beyond the facility, most enemy soldiers in the town of Hadithah and the surrounding villages put aside their weapons, removed their uniforms and departed the area. With their departure came increased cooperation from the civilians who remained behind.

After nearly a week of managing one of the largest dams in the Middle East all by himself, on 11 April SFC Camp was joined by two CA teams: CAT-A 51, comprised of Captain Kevin Burke, SFC Eddie Huey, SFC Theodore Even, and medic SFC Scott Johnson; and the rest of SFC Camp's own CAT-A 52, comprised of Major (MAJ) William Highberger, SFC Chris Arndt, and medic SFC Keith Gates. SFC Camp, the Team Engineer on CAT-A 52 was exhausted and relieved that the two teams had finally arrived. The two CA teams began by immediately identifying team tasks and individual responsibilities. CAT-A 52 took charge of managing the dam workers and facility operations, while CAT-A 51 took responsibility for organizing and supervising shift changes and coordinating for the return of Iraqi remains to local villages. The rest of CAT-A 52 soon became all too familiar with the challenges SFC Camp had been facing alone.

SFC Camp's assessments revealed that maintenance on the facility had been neglected for years. Designed by the Soviets and built during the 1970s, expanded in the late 1980s, and then placed in "cold storage" shortly before the Gulf War in 1991, the dam seemed to suffer from a consistent lack of attention. After the war, the dam was brought online and began producing electricity, though efficiency was hampered by neglect and lack of resources. The Iraqis blamed UN sanctions for the lack of desperately needed spare parts, but the dam's problems ran deeper than that. SFC Camp discovered that most of the door seals in the lower levels of the complex were rotted, which would allow the entire facility to flood if water rose to the level of the deep well pumps. If flooding did occur, it could cause an imbalance within the facility structure itself, resulting in a catastrophic failure capable of rupturing the dam. The local workers were all too aware of the extent of the electrical and structural problems of the dam, and the majority of them wanted to return home rather than risk the dam's collapse with them inside.

Even as the battle outside the facility waned, the



Al Qadisiyah Dam is commonly referred to by the name of the nearby village Hadithah. Located northwest of Baghdad on the Euphrates River, the dam provides electricity and irrigation capability to much of central Iraq.

difficulties inside the dam escalated. By 10 April, the situation was critical. The generators continually broke down, which hampered efforts to bring the main turbines back online. However, the generators were only half the problem; each time a turbine was started, the turbine would blow out the electrical panels and immediately stop again, cutting power to the pumps that kept the facility from flooding. In addition, the shaft of the only "working" turbine was warped. Under normal circumstances, the warped shaft would have rendered the turbine useless, but rising levels of water forced the dam crew to use it anyway. As soon as the turbine was engaged, the warped shaft caused a vibration that reverberated throughout the entire structure. SFC Camp and MAJ Highberger were in the lowest level of the dam assessing the condition of the deep well pumps and checking on the level of the rising water when the vibrations began. Alarmed by the violent shaking, MAJ Highberger thought the dam might be collapsing and began speeding towards the stairs in order to get up and out of the lower levels of the facility. SFC Camp, knowing the volume and intensity of the water that would rush in if the dam collapsed, calmly called to the major: "No sense in running; you can die tired or just die."

Workers managed to shut down the broken turbine before the dam collapsed, and they immediately began

checking for significant structural damage. Yet, the water continued to rise, and with it the workers' fears. Several times, SFC Camp had to literally force the dam employees to work on the facility, even as they insisted that nothing could be done to fix the dam. Their fear of the rising water was justified; if the water had risen approximately six more inches than it did, it would have reached the electrical components in the deep well pumps, requiring all personnel to be evacuated. In spite of the danger and the resistance, SFC Camp and the Iraqi dam employees eventually repaired one of the turbines, and brought a second turbine online soon after that. Only one deep well pump was running by noon

Alarmed by the violent shaking, MAJ Highberger thought the dam might be collapsing and began speeding towards the stairs.

on 11 April, and to continue running that pump alone would eventually burn it out. The dam workers eventually got two deep well pumps to function, though that still left them short of the three required to prevent the water from rising. Problems continued with the generators and other electrical components; however, the crew's increasing experience in resolving a multitude of problems, and SFC Camp's effective management of the dam workers, helped everyone involved to respond more successfully to troubles whenever they occurred.

Approximately one week after the dam was captured, an Army Corps of Engineers assessment team consisting of one officer and two NCOs arrived to assist in the operation of the dam. None of the personnel had the training or experience to evaluate or operate the dam, so the assessment team chief conducted daily, real-time video conferences (VTCs) with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) technical experts in Mobile, Alabama and other dam specialists in North Carolina.⁴ Realizing that the dam manager was more knowledgeable about the facility than anybody else could be, the Corps of Engineers representatives in North Carolina asked to have the dam manager present during the VTCs. Including him in the conferences also accorded him proper respect in the process of restoring the dam to full operation. With the arrival of the USACE

team, SFC Camp was relieved from his temporary and unexpected duty as NCOIC (non-commissioned officer in charge) of the fifth-largest dam in the Middle East.

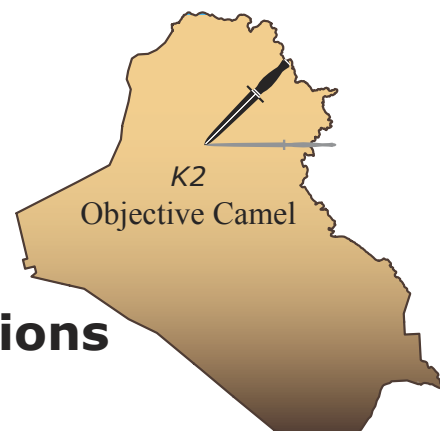
None of the CAT-A personnel anticipated managing a hydroelectric complex when they deployed for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. SFC Kevin Camp certainly did not plan to take charge of Hadithah Dam when he set out to conduct his initial assessment. Yet, managing a dam is exactly what SFC Camp and his fellow Civil Affairs soldiers found themselves doing in April 2003. Through sheer persistence and creative thinking, SFC Camp prevented environmental, logistical, and strategic disaster by keeping the dam operational. SFC Camp summed up his tour at Hadithah in this way: "I knew that if the dam had busted, even due to structural failure, most Iraqis would have blamed the coalition forces. I told workers when they wanted to leave the dam that they were required to remain at the facility and continue operations; we were going to get it working, whatever it took. If we had lost the dam, it would have had an enormous impact on the war. It could have turned the people against us. Not only would the U.S. be seen as destroying the dam, there would have been a lot of bridges washed out downriver and floods all the way to Karbala, not to mention the deaths of civilians and potentially U.S. military personnel." As is often the case in Civil Affairs, SFC Camp and the other members of CAT-As 51 and 52 successfully performed a seemingly isolated mission that in reality had a significant and far-reaching impact on U.S. interests abroad. 📌

Endnotes

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Team Tank:

Armor in Support of Special Operations



by Robert W. Jones, Jr.

Captain Celeen's M1A1 Abrams tank accidentally drove into a large hole as it traveled at high speed with no illumination during the assault on Objective Camel. Because the tank entered the deep well from the wrong end, it flipped over and landed with its turret buried in the soft sand.

ALTHOUGH Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) are not usually associated with armored units, they have been known to work together when the situation has warranted heavy support. During World War II, the legendary Colonel William O. Darby formed the provisional "Cannon Company" of four M-3 half-tracks mounted with 75mm guns to give additional firepower to the Rangers during the Italian campaign.¹ However, not until Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) did ARSOF again work with armor forces to any appreciable degree, and even then, the association was weak.

Early in operations, armored Task Force (TF) 1-63 was airlifted into Bashur Airfield in support of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-

North).² After taking three days to arrive, however, the armor force was not able to effectively leave the airfield perimeter to provide an immediate impact on the combat situation in northern Iraq. In fact, three days after TF 1-63's arrival, the major Iraqi elements in the north surrendered, and Kurdish *Peshmerga* and Task Force Viking (10th Special Forces Group) seized Kirkuk and Mosul. TF 1-63 only entered operations in the north as an occupying force in the cities controlled by TF Viking.³ With such a tenuous association in the north, it again fell to the Rangers to prove the worth of armor in special operations.

In a situation reminiscent of that faced by Darby and the Rangers in World War II, the 75th Ranger Regiment found itself in need of armor support in Iraq. The Regi-





Soldiers from C/1/75th Rangers and C/2/70th Armor established a blocking position on Highway 1 north of Tikrit. The units proved that Armor and ARSOF could work together successfully.

ment had discussed attaching an armor force during mission planning, but no formal arrangements were made. In the course of their operations in the western and northern deserts, however, the Rangers concluded that they required an armor force to confront Iraqi tanks, and to send the message that tanks were operating almost unopposed along Highway 1 north of Baghdad.⁴⁵ The request for forces worked its way to Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), down to 5th Corps headquarters, and ultimately to C Company, 2nd Battalion, 70th Armor Regiment (C/2/70th Armor).

While it is not clear whether C/2/70th Armor was specifically selected for the mission or if it was simply luck, the Rangers were getting a very experienced armor unit. The company had previously spent six months in Kuwait under Operation DESERT SPRING (May–October 2002), returning to Fort Riley, Kansas, in November 2002. After deployment to Kuwait in February 2003, C/2/70th Armor had fought from the Kuwaiti border to Objective Rams, just south of Baghdad, attached to 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, before moving back south and being attached to Task Force 1-41 fighting near As Samawah.⁶

On 31 March 2003, C/2/70th Armor was fighting as part of TF 1-41 Infantry attached to the 82nd Airborne Division near As Samawah.⁷ The next day Captain (CPT) Shane Celeen, the commander of C Company, received what some may have considered an early April Fool's Day message after the hard fight north: move almost one hundred kilometers south to Talil Air Base, located twenty kilometers southwest of

An Nasiriyah, and then conduct an air movement back north to support CJSOTF-West. CPT Celeen was ordered to leave one tank platoon with TF 1-41, and wait for heavy equipment transporters (HETs) to move his tanks south. After waiting several hours for the promised HETs, CPT Celeen ordered the company to move out under its own power. At 0100 hours on 2 April 2003, C/2/70th Armor headed south.

Arriving at the air base approximately five hours later, CPT Celeen met with a liaison officer from the 75th Ranger Regiment. CPT Celeen and his headquarters platoon leader then flew in and reported to the Ranger tactical operations center, where they discovered that the armor company, newly dubbed "Team Tank," would fall under the operational control of 1/75th Ranger Battalion. While the Ranger Regiment included some commanders with mechanized experience, most had not operated with armor for many years. One of CPT Celeen's first tasks, therefore, was to brief the capabilities and logistics requirements of the M1A1 Abrams tank. Planners focused on fuel consumption as a key concern, since a single M1A1 used almost as much fuel as an entire Ranger company in Ground Mobility Vehicles (GMVs).

While CPT Celeen worked with the Ranger staff, the rest of C/2/70th Armor prepared for air movement. The air movement of tanks by C-17 was new to both the tankers and the Air Force loadmasters. In fact, most of the armor soldiers had never even flown in a C-17 during peacetime, much less in a combat zone. The tank crews worked through the process of

draining three-fourths of the fuel and securing the tanks by chain to the aircraft. Due to weight limitations, only one tank and its crew could be transported per C-17 sortie. (The first tank to go was the company commander's, with the rest of his crew.) The gunner recalled that the burdened aircraft performed "a long slow takeoff that felt like it was doing a wheelie."⁸

The air movement of C/2/70th Armor required three days to complete. The company's ten M1A1 tanks, three M113 armored personnel carriers, one single fire support vehicle, three cargo trucks, two fuel trucks, and a single High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV, "humvee") required a total of fifteen C-17 sorties between Tallil Air Base and H-1 Airfield, located five hundred kilometers to the northwest.⁹ As each lift arrived, the tankers consolidated in a *laager* site, conducted maintenance, and prepared for their next mission. The last two tanks and crews arrived only two hours before the ground armored convoy (GAC) departed H-1 for Mission Support Site (MSS) Grizzly, a desert landing strip located between the Hadithah Dam and Tikrit.

On the surface, Team Tank's mission seemed simple enough: support the Rangers in a series of raids, and interdict main avenues of escape for regime loyalists and high value targets (HVTs) attempting to flee to Syria. Once Highway 2 and Highway 4 through the western desert were blocked by coalition forces, north-south Highway 1 became the primary avenue of escape. HVTs would follow Highway 1 north as far as they could, then cut west toward Syria on any number of lesser roads running through the desert. In order to carry out its mission, Team Tank would be participating in raids that included between fifty and one hundred kilometers of movement each way. While the tanks had no problem maneuvering once on the objectives, they were not built to travel long distances. Through hard work and perseverance, the tank crews and the company's small maintenance section made up for the lack of direct support maintenance and kept the tanks running in spite of the intrinsic stresses of the operations.

The first operation out of MSS Grizzly earned the soldiers of Team Tank the Rangers' respect as they proved that armor soldiers were as hard as their tanks. On 9 April, C/2/70th Armor and 1/75th Rangers conducted a night attack to secure Objective Camel (K2 Airfield), under conditions of zero illumination and little visibility after the initiation of mortar fire. As the tanks began the attack, CPT Celeen suddenly dropped off the command net. The



The lead tanks of C/2/70th Armor refueled after landing at Objective Serpent (H-1 Airfield). The Rangers also took the opportunity to ready their vehicles for the move to Mission Support Site Grizzly.

Ranger operations officer commanding the attack tried to raise Celeen, but his efforts proved fruitless. The armor commander seemed to be out of action.

While CPT Celeen was, indeed, out of action, it was not enemy fire that had disabled his tank; rather, the commander's tank had rolled into a forty-foot deep hole in the middle of what appeared to be a wheat field. Traveling at between five and ten miles per hour with zero percent illumination, the tank had unwittingly driven over the edge of a large hole and then rolled over until the tank rested upside down, directly on top of the turret. Luckily for CPT Celeen and his crew, Celeen had stressed rollover drills during predeployment training, so everybody in the company knew exactly what to do in this unfortunate situation. As soon as the company's executive officer, First Lieutenant (1LT) Drummond, realized what had happened, he moved his tank forward and began recovery operations while also protecting the vulnerable crew of the overturned tank from enemy fire.

Meanwhile, CPT Celeen and the rest of the crew were trapped inside a living nightmare. Over the next hour, though it seemed like an eternity, the men quickly assessed their situation and began their own recovery. In addition to the basic conditions that trapped it, the crew's self-rescue was hampered by fuel leaks, requiring the tank's power to be turned off. Using flashlights, CPT Celeen and his gunner, Sergeant (SGT) Arthur Thorness, performed first aid on the loader, Specialist (SPC) Michael Colchiski, whose left hand had been almost severed off during the rollover. While Celeen and Thorness worked on Colchiski, driver Private First Class Christopher Bake wriggled his way through

the narrow driver's hatch and began digging through the sand using his hands, eventually tunneling his way to freedom. Celeen and Thorness pushed and pulled Colchiski through the tunnel to fresh air and medical attention. The tunnel was so narrow that CPT Celeen had to strip off his chemical suit, emerging into the desert night clad only in his underwear and boots, and coated in blood, fuel, and hydraulic fluid.

After CPT Celeen verified that his crew received proper care, he transferred to 1LT Drummond's tank and continued the attack. Team Tank still needed to block Highway 1. With recovery assets over forty kilometers away, the company declared the overturned tank a total loss. Since the wreck was located in hostile territory, filled with sensitive gear, loaded with ammunition and soaked in fuel, they concluded that they had to destroy the tank. Two tank rounds brought about an inglorious end for the tank. The crew lost almost all of its personal gear with that decision, and had to make do for the rest of its tour in Iraq. As for the respect garnered by the episode, the Rangers recommended 1LT Drummond for the Bronze Star with "V" device.¹⁰

The attack on Objective Camel ensured the continued association of C/2/70th Armor with the 75th Ranger Regiment. On 11 April 2003, Team Tank and A Company of 1/75th Rangers combined their strengths and conducted an attack on Objective Badger: Al Sarha Airfield and site of the Iraqi Air Force Academy. The mission was to attack and seize key terrain, and to interdict Highway 1 in order to prevent the escape of HVTs. An on-order mission was to move to the site of a downed F-15E (designated Objective Falcon), search for survivors, and recover any remains of crewmembers. The combined 1/75th Rangers and C/2/70th Armor GAC, consisting of thirty-eight vehicles of

nine different types, moved sixty kilometers cross-country under cover of darkness to Objective Badger.

After a short stop to refuel the tanks, the task force attack on Objective Badger began with mortar fire and rotary wing close air support. Satellite imagery had indicated a fence line at the objective, but when the tanks assaulted the line, they found it to be an easily bypassed agricultural sprinkler system. Moving quickly through the first objective, the tanks and Rangers, mounted in GMVs, assaulted through several Iraqi vehicles that had been destroyed by helicopter gunships.¹¹

The Rangers and the tankers coordinated closely as they dismounted to meet Iraqi resistance. Near one set of buildings, a few Iraqi defenders had stymied one Ranger squad by ducking behind a brick wall and spraying automatic weapon fire over the wall. Every time the squad attempted to move forward, it was met with a renewed barrage of fire. The solution was simple for the tankers; fire two HEAT (high explosive anti-tank) rounds through the wall. The Rangers then assaulted through the hole and killed the remaining Iraqi infantry.

Once Objective Badger was secure, part of the force moved to Objective Falcon, where the remains of the F-15E crew were successfully recovered. The Rangers and tankers performed both missions without casualty. The Iraqis did not fare as well: their losses included several armored vehicles, including two T-55 tanks, twelve antiaircraft guns, and approximately seventy-five Iraqi soldiers. The tankers had once again acquitted themselves with courage and skill, as exemplified by CPT Celeen, who was later awarded the Bronze Star with "V" device for his actions at Objective Badger.¹²

The assaults on Objectives Camel and Badger proved that armor and ARSOF could work together effectively, if not seamlessly. The Rangers discovered that they had overestimated the tanks' ability to travel long distances quickly, but admired their ability to "burst" past the Rangers' GMVs and gain the advantage of speed and firepower on any Iraqi opposition.¹³ The operations also revealed that future night operation coordination needed to reconcile the Rangers' use of infrared sights with the tankers' use of thermal sights. In spite of these slight differences in operational capability, C/2/70th Armor and the 75th Ranger Regiment validated Colonel Darby's World War II Cannon Company experiment. In mid-April 2003, C/2/70th Armor returned to TF 1-41 and the Rangers went about their usual operations, but their success working together opened a door for possible future cooperation. 📌

Through close coordination, the Rangers and Team Tank successfully conducted assaults and established blocking positions in the deserts of north-central Iraq.



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Cannon Company

by Robert W. Jones, Jr.

A unique unit of Army Special Operations Forces during World War II was the “Cannon Company” that served with both the Rangers and the First Special Service Force. While Special Operations Forces are not normally associated with armored forces, legendary Colonel William O. Darby formed the provisional “Cannon Company” of half-track mounted 75mm guns to add firepower to the 1st Ranger Battalion during the Italian campaign.¹

After combat experience in North Africa and Sicily, then Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Darby determined that the Rangers needed additional firepower, especially against armored forces. On 1 September 1943, LTC Darby organized a provisional anti-tank platoon under the command of Captain Charles M. Shunstrom. Former artillerymen and volunteers were transferred from within the 1st Ranger Battalion, which soon became known as the “Cannon Company.”

LTC Darby was able to secure the equipment while in Sicily and the Cannon Company’s first action was during the invasion of Italy (Operation AVALANCHE) in September 1943. The equipment consisted of four M-3 half-tracks mounted with 75mm guns. Later .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine guns were added for extra fire support. Soon the Cannon Company became known as Darby’s “Ace in the Hole” and the Rangers’ gun trucks were dubbed “Ace of Diamonds,” “Ace of Hearts,” “Ace of Spades,” and “Ace of Clubs.”²

The Cannon Company fought with the Rangers throughout the Italian campaign. The Cannon Company left 1st Ranger Battalion and became part of the 6615th Ranger Force (Provisional) when now Colonel Darby formed that headquarters on 16 January 1944. The 6615th consisted

of the force headquarters, the Cannon Company, and the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Ranger Battalions. The Cannon Company was part of the 6615th Ranger Force when it landed at Anzio (Operation SHINGLE).

On 30 January 1944, the 6615th Ranger Force launched an infiltration attack toward the town of Cisterna (sometimes called Cisterna de Littoria) to the southeast of the Anzio beachhead. The resulting battle was the worse defeat in Ranger history, leading to the annihilation of the 1st and 3rd Ranger Battalions (resulting in 12 killed, 36 wounded, and 743 captured from the two battalions). Only six Rangers who had infiltrated to Cisterna were able to make their way back to friendly lines.³ The 4th Ranger Battalion, supported by the Cannon Company and some attached tank destroyers, attempted to break through to its surrounded comrades, sustaining 30 killed and 58 wounded in a brave, yet futile relief attempt.⁴

After the disaster at Cisterna, the 6615th Ranger Force was disbanded. While some of the veteran Rangers returned to the United States, many transferred to the First Special Service Force (FSSF), including the Cannon Company, and continued serving throughout the campaign in southern France until the FSSF was disbanded on 5 December 1944. 📌

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This is What You Signed Up For

The Attack on Ayn Sifni

by Kenn Finlayson



THE small village of Ayn Sifni occupies a strategic location on the main road north of Mosul, close to the Green Line that indicates the political boundary between greater Iraq and Kurdish territory to the north. In order to confront the Kurdish forces to the north, the Iraqi 108th Regiment, 8th Infantry Division maintained two battalions of occupying troops in the traditionally Kurdish village.² The liberation of Ayn Sifni by U.S. and Kurdish forces would open the route to Mosul and protect the Kurdish lines of communication.

Since arriving in Bashur on 23 March, Captain (CPT) Gary Caldwell (pseudonym) and his Special Forces (SF) team had linked up with other 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) personnel and Kurdish forces in the vicinity of Ayn Sifni. The well organized Kurdish *supays* (battalions) occupied positions on the ridgelines north of the village and maintained constant surveillance of the occupying troops. The *supays* rotated personnel from the ridgelines in thirty-day increments, as they had done for a number of years. From these positions the Kurdish forces could muster two hundred fighters in 30 minutes, and six hundred in 2 hours.³ As events in Iraq unfolded and the strategic value of the village was revealed, 10th SFG commanders and their Kurdish counterparts developed a plan to attack and seize Ayn Sifni.

Two weeks on a steady diet of potato

soup, rice, bread, and tea did little to dampen the ardor of the SF Operational Detachments–A (ODAs) working with the Kurdish forces. Originally deployed to the area as hunter–killer teams against Iraqi armor, the American troops easily transitioned to their new mission. In an effort to drive the Iraqis out of Ayn Sifni with minimal engagement, the ODAs initiated an orchestrated bombing campaign against the Iraqi units left in the village.⁴ Unfortunately, lack of dedicated aircraft hindered the effectiveness of the bombing campaign, and in one instance allowed an entire Iraqi battalion to load up on buses and trucks in broad daylight and pull out of the area unscathed.⁵ After that,

The streets of Ayn Sifni reflect the damage sustained as the coalition forces swept through the village during the battle.





Team members call for close air support during the battle of Ayn Sifni. The ability to quickly bring in U.S. air power was a decisive factor in many of the battles.



Hill 003 provided observation of the village from the northwest. The dead space immediately west of the village was unobservable, a fact that favored the defenders.



Special Forces team personnel observe the village of Ayn Sifni from the high ground to the north.

intelligence estimates put the remaining Iraqi force strength in Ayn Sifni at two platoons.⁶ In order to open the road to Mosul, Ayn Sifni would have to be neutralized.

SF Advanced Operational Base (AOB) 050—comprised of ODAs 051, 055, and 056—focused on the liberation of Ayn Sifni. The AOB established a program of reconnaissance that concentrated on the areas north and west of the village, and provided, with one exception, good observation of the objective. On the southeast side of the village, low ground prevented direct observation by the teams, and they were unable to maneuver to a position to see into the dead space. South of Ayn Sifni, the main road out was under observation all the way to the intersection with the main highway. The groundwork had been laid for an offensive against the village.

On 5 April, word came that the Kurds were advancing along the Green Line and that Ayn Sifni needed to be taken to facilitate the movement on Mosul. The deployment of forces against Ayn Sifni on 6 April required that the SF teams split and link up with the various elements of the *supay*. ODA 051 commander CPT Michael Dawson colocated his team with the commander of the 12th *Supay* and three hundred *Peshmerga* warriors on the east side of the village. Dawson considered the upcoming operation to be the culmination of a mission that began more than a month earlier with a tension-filled land infiltration and a stressful personal security detail.⁷ After three weeks of intensive training with his Kurdish allies, Dawson was finally in a position to see the fruits of the team's labor.

In the area north of the village, four members of ODA 056, part of ODA 051, and a *Peshmerga* 82mm mortar platoon established an observation post (OP). Further to the west, a *Peshmerga* section of heavy weapons was teamed with ODA 055. The two weapons elements were to begin firing on Ayn Sifni thirty minutes before the commencement of the ground attack, allowing for the element in the east to infiltrate into the village.

Calmly advancing through the hail of fire, Ritter and his men, aided by the close air support of the recently arrived F-14s and FA-18s, scattered the Iraqi forces pinning down the bulk of the troops on the hill.

Behind the high ground on the west side of town, ODA 056 (minus those on the north side OP) accompanied three hundred *Peshmerga* as they began moving toward the top of the

hill. The significance of the unobservable dead space soon became evident; a fusillade of fire erupted as the force crested the hill.⁸ Pinned down on the hill, CPT Caldwell and the *Peshmerga* took to the ground to avoid the intense fire. The ODA 056 soldiers on the northern OP worked to bring in close air support to relieve the pressure on the men pinned down on the hill, while ODA 051 and the three hundred *Peshmerga* of the 12th *Supay* began to attack Ayn Sifni from the east. Heavy fighting continued for more than four hours as the estimated two platoons of Iraqis turned out to be more than three hundred troops.⁹ The original plan for an assault from the east, supported by fires from multiple locations, dissolved into a multipronged attack from three separate directions.¹⁰

On the western edge of the hill NE of town, Sergeant Major Scott Ritter led 150 *Peshmerga* off the hill and into a ravine running towards the low ground on the edge of the village. Calmly advancing through the hail of fire, Ritter and his men, aided by the close air support

of the recently arrived F-14s and FA-18s, scattered the Iraqi forces pinning down the bulk of the troops on the hill. This action opened up the west side of the village to the assault.¹¹

Once the Iraqi position engaging the hill was reduced, the *Peshmerga* forces swept into the village. The *supay* commander insisted to CPT Dawson that they halt and plan the next stage of the assault. After considerable discussion, Dawson managed to convince the Kurdish commander that the forces needed to sweep to the southern edge of the village, and consolidate their position before stopping to plan further.¹² The assault force soon reached the southern edge of Ayn Sifni and began to consolidate. At this point, the Iraqi forces launched a counterattack.

The Iraqi forces south of the town approached in trucks, dismounted from their vehicles, and advanced across an open field toward the village. The counterattack force employed 82mm mortars to cover its assault. The *Peshmerga* forces reacted quickly, and met the attack with mortar and machine gun fire from the protection of the buildings on the edge of village. The Special Forces troops contributed to the fight by employing their .50 caliber sniper rifle to deadly effect.¹³ The counterattack failed, and the Iraqi force retreated.

The ability of the Peshmerga forces to rapidly coalesce in substantial numbers never failed to impress the Special Forces teams.



In the village itself, the *Peshmerga* conducted a house-to-house search for stay-behinds, and to collect abandoned military equipment. CPT Caldwell noticed that the Kurds were very selective about which houses they entered. Houses with unlocked doors were not touched during the sweep, while any locked doors



The rough and ready Peshmerga forces proved to be a reliable ally for the coalition. In the background, captured Iraqi troops are rounded up.

were kicked in and the house subjected to an intensive search. When he inquired about the selection procedure, Caldwell was told that the Kurdish residents of the village had been told in advance to leave their doors unlocked when the *Peshmerga* entered the village. By default, any locked doors belonged to the occupying Iraqi forces. Caldwell noted with interest the ability of the Kurds to pass information in and out of the occupied village without compromising the mission.¹⁴

The liberation of Ayn Sifni opened the way for the coalition move on Mosul. In the course of the battle, 33 Iraqis were killed, 54 wounded, and 230 taken prisoner. Friendly losses amounted to a single *Peshmerga* fighter killed. The Iraqi weapons that were captured explained the enemy's ability to bring heavy fire on the troops on the northeast hilltop: five 82mm mortars, one D20 artillery piece, two 37mm and one 57mm air defense artillery weapons, and one 73mm recoilless rifle, in addition to numerous machine guns ranging in caliber from 7.62mm to 23mm.¹⁵ In the end, the Kurds recovered control of a traditionally Kurdish village, allowing them to begin the process of reintegrating

the Kurdish population. For the soldiers of 10th Special Forces Group, the battle of Ayn Sifni proved to be another successful example of SF's ability to live, train, and fight with indigenous populations—exactly what CPT Dawson and his teammates had signed up for. 📌

Endnotes

- 1 Master Sergeant Patrick Quinn, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenn Finlayson, 25 June 2003, Fort Carson, CO, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Captain Gary Caldwell, (pseudonym), B Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenn Finlayson, 24 June 2003, Fort Carson, CO, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Master Sergeant Patrick Quinn, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenn Finlayson, 24 June 2003, Fort Carson, CO, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 Caldwell interview, 24 June 2003.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Captain Michael Dawson, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, interview by LTC Robert Jones, 25 June 2003, Fort Carson, CO, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 After Action report, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, Fort Carson, CO, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 Captain Gary Caldwell, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenn Finlayson, 25 June 2003, Fort Carson, CO, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
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- 11 Sergeant Major Scott Ritter, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles Briscoe 3 July 2003, Kirkuk, Iraq, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
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- 14 Caldwell interview, 25 June 2003.
- 15 After Action report.



The Battle for Debecka Crossroads

by Nathan S. Lowrey

ON 24 March 2003, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (FOB 102), occupied the western half of Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF)-North's area of responsibility. Situated along the Green Line, the tentative demarcation boundary between the Kurdish Autonomous Zone and Iraq to the south, 2nd Battalion faced four dug-in and well-equipped divisions of the Iraqi 5th Corps. Covering a two-hundred-kilometer front with little more than light antitank weapons, limited close air support (CAS), and assistance from their *Peshmerga* allies, FOB 102's dual mission was to defend the north, and to keep as many Iraqi troops as possible focused on them and not on Baghdad.¹

Second Battalion accomplished the mission by dividing the front into three company sectors: Advanced Operating Base (AOB) 050 to the west in Dihuk, AOB 370 in Aqrah, and AOB 040 to the east in Irbil. Within these sectors, the companies observed seven targeted areas of interest covering the main

avenues to the south. During an initial defensive phase, which lasted approximately a week, FOB 102 watched the Iraqi positions from its observation posts and called in CAS to degrade the enemy threat.²

During the first few days of April 2003, FOB 102 and their *Peshmerga* counterparts took the offensive.

On 6 April 2003, Peshmerga soldiers and ODAs from 10th and 3rd SFGs began their assault on Iraqi forces arrayed along the ridge north of Debecka.



While advancing south, they liberated numerous villages and steadily drove the enemy toward the urban centers of Kirkuk and Mosul. In some cases, progress was unopposed and rapid, the enemy having abandoned his positions following the devastation wrought by successive air attacks. In others, they encountered a determined enemy who

not only fought to retain terrain, but also launched multiple counterattacks to reclaim what had been lost. Perhaps the most intense resistance faced by FOB 102 was in Debecka, on 6 April 2003.³

The town of Debecka, located forty kilometers south-southwest of Irbil, sits to the southeast of a four-way intersection where the roughly northeast-southwest

road from Irbil to Al Qayyarah meets the northwest-southeast road from Kirkuk to Mosul. Approximately three kilometers northeast of the main intersection, a bypass road leads off the Irbil-Qayyarah road back into the northwestern section of the town, which sits on the Kirkuk-Mosul road. Still further to the northeast, approximately five kilometers from the crossroads, is Zurqah Ziraw Dagh Ridge. Referred to by Americans as "Dog Ridge," it is 110 kilometers long and 400 meters high, and is bisected by the Irbil-Qayyarah road. On the northeast side of the ridge, twenty kilometers from the crossroads, is a small village named Pir Da'ud, where Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 044 established an observation post during the initial stages of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.⁴

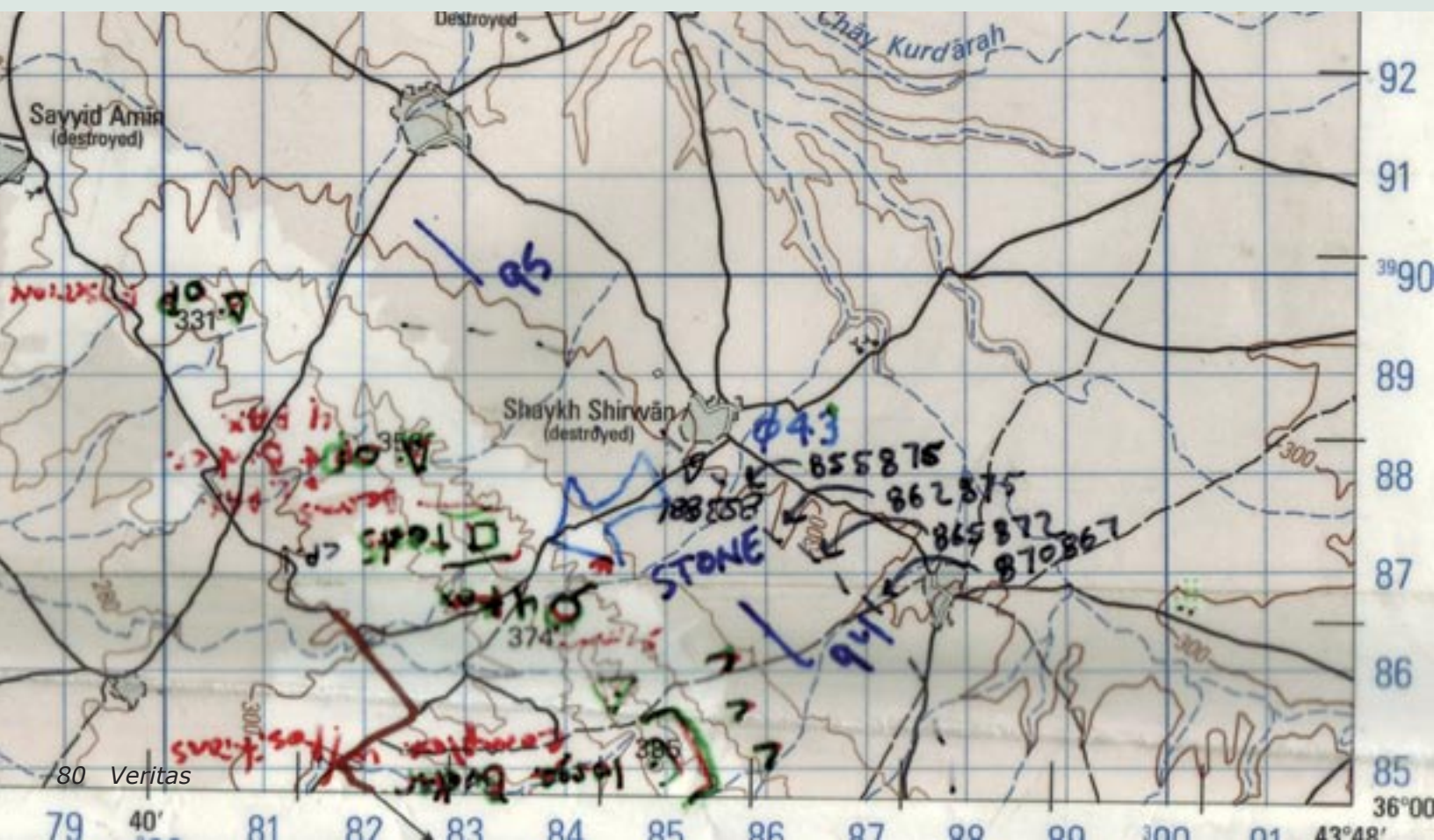
According to intelligence reports, Iraqi forces had occupied positions along the northern base of Dog Ridge as recently as two days before ODA 044's arrival, when the enemy displaced to the crest of the hill. During the days preceding the attack on Debecka Crossroads, ODA 044 was able to observe Iraqi soldiers manning mortar, heavy machine gun, and anti-aircraft artillery positions. Although the team's

exposed position was subject to enemy artillery and rocket fire, it retaliated by calling in CAS and drove the Iraqis back to the southwestern face of the ridge.⁵

On 5 April 2003, as the threat lessened and the likelihood of a successful assault increased, the local *Peshmerga* commander announced that he was going to attack the ridge and had already sent engineers to clear the road of mines. Shortly thereafter, the Special Forces (SF) soldiers heard the sound of small arms fire and exploding artillery rounds near the ridge. The *Peshmerga* were compelled to abandon their assault, and for the next three hours, the Iraqis shelled several local villages in retaliation. Later that evening, Major (MAJ) Eric Howard, AOB 040's commanding officer, met with General Mustafa, the Kurdish Democratic Party commander of the Western Military District. They discussed the necessity of seizing the ridge and agreed that a coordinated coalition attack would commence the next day.⁶

The assault force assembled in Pir Da'ud that night to prepare for the attack. In addition to ODAs 043 and 044, four ODAs from FOB 33 had also arrived to support the attack with gun-mounted Ground Mobility Vehicles

The Battle of Debecka Crossroads was a three-prong assault against Iraqi forces over Zurqah Ziraw Dagh ("Dog") Ridge. Objective Stone was the westernmost objective, and required considerable CAS before it could be secured.



(GMVs). The plan was to soften the ridgeline with close air support that evening, cross the line of departure at sunrise, and launch four simultaneous assaults against the ridgeline. To the southeast, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Thomas Sandoval's half of ODA 044 (044B) and 150 *Peshmerga* would attack the 'T' intersection formed by the bypass to Debecka and the Irbil–Qayyarah road north of Debecka—Objective Rock. ODA 391, led by Captain (CPT) Eric Wright, and ODA 392, led by CPT Matthew Saunders, would support the dismounted infantry with heavy machine gun fire. In the center, near Hills 419 and 429, two 250-man *Peshmerga* columns were to attack independently. To the northwest, CPT David Fowels' ODA 043

and 150 *Peshmerga* would attack Hill 374, which was designated Objective Stone. To the north, ODA 394, led by CPT James Spivey, and ODA 395, led by CPT Eric Stanton, would support the northwest assault by fire. Although aerial reconnaissance suggested that the ridge was lightly defended, prior contact with brigades from the Iraqi 1st Mechanized Infantry Division made the outcome of the attack far from certain. After the meeting, several ODA splits rolled south to watch for enemy activity, but only the sound of friendly CAS missions against the objective disturbed the evening.⁷

On 6 April, the coalition forces marshaled in the assembly area at 0600 local time. Although they did not cross the line of departure until 0700, an hour later than planned, progress was swift and the assault forces quickly reached their attack positions at the base of the ridge. The two independent *Peshmerga* columns met only limited opposition, and reaching their objective first, swarmed across the central portion of the ridgeline. However, the two flank columns faced much greater resistance and the assault became a battle.⁸

To the northwest, ODAs 394 and 395 waited in their GMVs for the CAS to do its job before moving into their designated support-by-fire positions. When the CAS arrived, only one of four bombs dropped hit the target. The teams then closed to within seventeen hundred meters and began to engage the enemy with MK19

40mm automatic grenade launchers and M2 .50 caliber machine guns. Before long, the Iraqis responded with their own heavy machine guns and mortars. Although the ODAs suppressed the objective for more than thirty minutes, expending approximately half of their ammunition, the *Peshmerga* refused to assault without additional CAS.⁹

Now in contact with the enemy, ODA 043 was able to

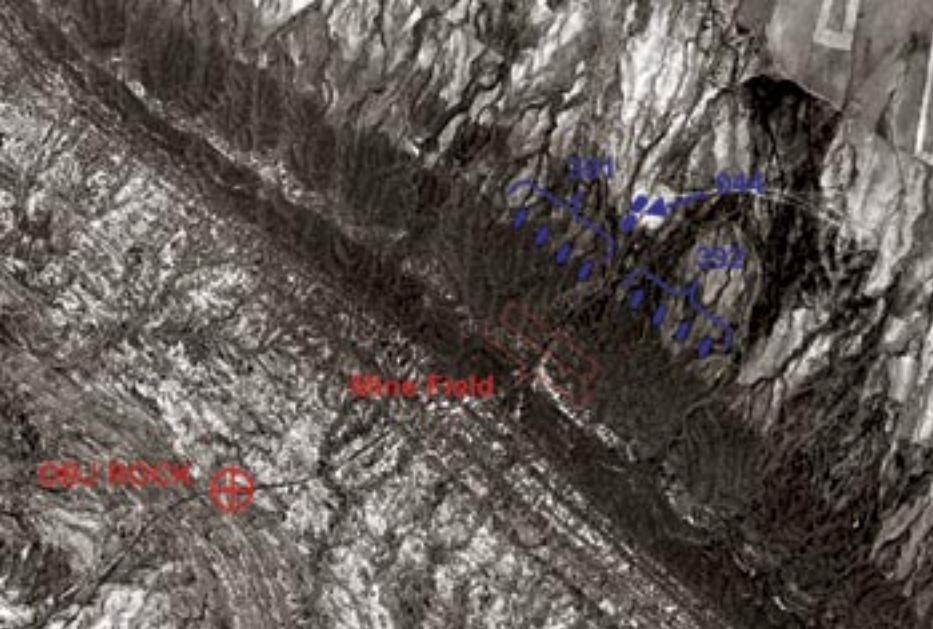
get support from both U.S. Air Force B-52s and U.S. Navy F-18s. While ODA 043 coordinated the CAS missions, ODAs 394 and 395 used the distraction to disengage and withdraw four kilometers to the rear. Because they continued to receive 120mm mortar fire, they withdrew a second time and used the opportunity to refresh their ammunition supply. The teams then returned to the wadi where CPT Fowels and the *Peshmerga* prepared to assault the ridge.

Although ODAs 394 and 395 moved to resume their support-by-fire positions, rough terrain precluded swift vehicular movement and the assault force crested Hill 374 before the teams could bring their guns to bear. The *Peshmerga* quickly disposed of the Iraqi defenders, capturing several prisoners, mortars, and heavy machine guns.¹⁰

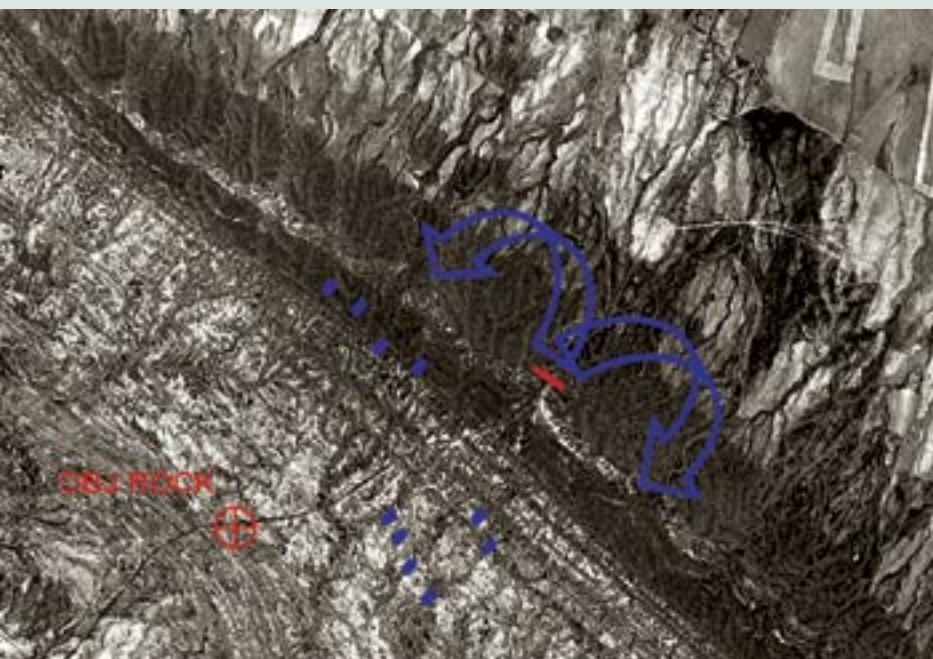
The teams led by SFC Sandoval, who served as the ground force commander for the southernmost objective, rolled together to the attack position at Kas-nazan. This abandoned village was located midway between Pir Da'ud and a pump house at the base of



Close air support provided by U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy planes was invaluable to the advance and engagements in the Battle for Debecka Crossroads.



ODAs 391, 392, and 044B accompanied Peshmerga soldiers as they advanced over Dog Ridge toward Objective Rock. The Peshmerga cleared a mine field and insisted that the Americans follow the road over the ridge. When the attack force encountered a large dirt roadblock just below the ridge that could not be breached quickly, the teams bypassed the obstacle by abandoning the road and crossing the ridge elsewhere.



Dog Ridge. As they continued on, using the road as a control feature, ODA 391 traveled along the northwestern flank, ODA 392 took the southeastern parallel, and ODA 044B and the *Peshmerga* took the middle. The mounted heavy gun teams operated in two vehicle sections, each armed with MK19s and M2 .50 caliber heavy machine guns. Each of the maneuver elements possessed its own forward air controller and, because he expected ODA 044B to meet the stiffest resistance, MAJ Howard granted it priority of fires.¹¹

Although the original plan had been to return to the paved road once they had reached the base of the hill, the Iraqis had blocked the road with a large mound of earth and numerous land mines.

After waiting fifteen minutes while the *Peshmerga* attempted to clear the obstacle, the ODAs decided to continue the advance cross-country. The teams forged ahead on goat trails that wound toward the top of the ridge, with ODAs 044 and 392 to the east, and ODA 391 to the west of the road.¹²

Although the assault force initially met only limited Iraqi resistance, once it reached the reverse slope on the southeast side of the road it encountered dug-in troops supported by heavy weapons. During a brief skirmish, SF and *Peshmerga* soldiers captured approximately thirty enemy prisoners, including several officers and two Republican Guardsmen. One Iraqi lieutenant colonel confirmed that the aerial bombardments had demoralized his soldiers, although not as much as being abandoned by their own armor and artillery units the previous day. In the end, the Iraqis on the ridge welcomed the opportunity to surrender.¹³

After the ridge was secure, the *Peshmerga* force continued toward the crossroads. Unable to overcome the Iraqis independently, the *Peshmerga* requested support from ODA 044B. Although directed to halt at the objective, SFC Sandoval realized that coalition forces were in direct contact, that thick fog impaired his ability to control the battle from Objective Rock, and that the level ground was essentially indefensible. Blocked by the ridgeline from communicating with MAJ Howard and the company's B-Team for further guidance, Sandoval decided to press the attack and directed all but a few SF to proceed to the crossroads.¹⁴

Upon reaching the crossroads, the SF teams quickly gained the upper hand and established control over the area. Split teams from ODA 391 took up positions to the northwest and southeast, to cover the flanks, while another split from ODA 392 overwatched the intersection from three hundred meters to the north. Then, having spotted two enemy mortar tubes between the town and the crossroads, ODA 392 regrouped and moved off in pursuit. Meanwhile, ODA 391 engaged several trucks and nontactical vehicles (identified as Iraqi

by the *Peshmerga*) moving to and from Debecka with Javelin missiles and heavy machine guns. The teams maintained dominance for approximately forty-five minutes, before the battle heated up again.¹⁵

Once in full control, the SF teams found the situation quickly deteriorating. First, ODA 391 spotted a suspicious vehicle parked two kilometers south of the intersection. SF soldiers destroyed another vehicle that attempted to elude the blocking position and refused to heed warning shots. The group then began to receive mortar and artillery fire. Finally, as the element leaders conferred with one another, they noticed that the suspicious vehicle and several troop carriers were moving again and were only four hundred meters away. The SF teams paused to determine the vehicle's intent; it was flashing its lights (a prearranged surrender signal), but the SF soldiers also thought they saw muzzle flashes.¹⁶

The vehicle's intent became more than clear when several tanks suddenly materialized on either side of the road behind the vehicle, and another tank and several armored personnel carriers appeared to the west. The ODAs began to receive direct fire from the tanks and quickly withdrew to an intermediate ridgeline halfway between the cross-

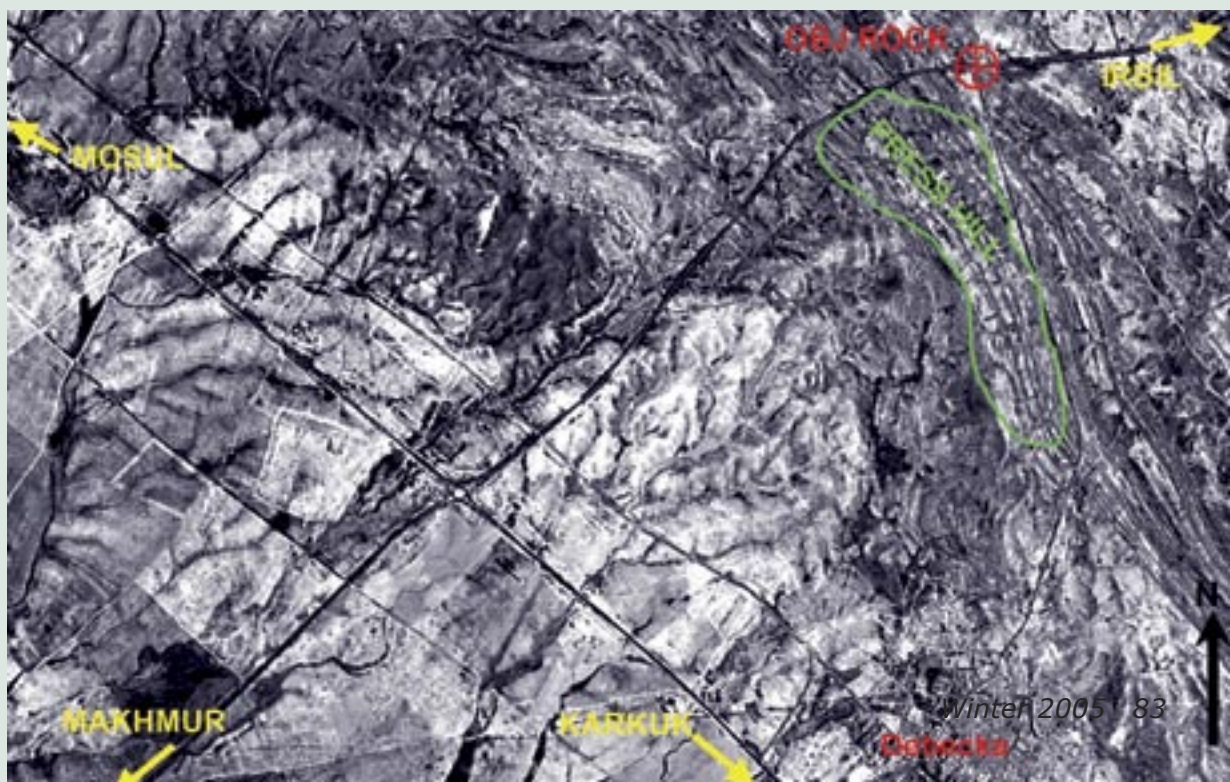
roads and Objective Rock. Before departing the crossroads, ODAs 391 and 392 each attempted to engage an armored personnel carrier with Javelin antitank missiles, but the weapon's tracker took too long to warm up and they left without firing.¹⁷

ODAs 391, 392, and 044B established a hasty linear defense at the intermittent ridge, with the mounted heavy gun teams situated on the eastern and western sides of the road. As they continued to receive tank, mortar, and heavy machine gun fire, at least five Iraqi tanks, four armored personnel carriers, two troop trucks, several command vehicles, and a company of infantry approached the intersection. The ODAs anxiously returned fire with Javelin missiles and heavy machine guns, forcing the enemy tanks to halt behind an embankment paralleling the south side of the east-west road. Dismounted infantry from the armored personnel carriers sought cover in an abandoned hamlet. The success of the stopping action caused the SF teams to choose to defend the ridge, rather than merely delay the counterattack.¹⁸

As the battle continued, MAJ Howard and the B-Team from AOB 040 had pushed forward to Objective Rock to better control the situation. Also gathering at this location were numerous *Peshmerga* fighters, Kurdish officials, and members of the media. Unfortunately, an incoming F-14 dropped a two thousand pound bomb in the midst of the group at Objective Rock for the enemy soldiers at the Debecka Crossroads and dropped a two thousand-pound bomb in their midst. The blast killed or wounded ten to fifteen *Peshmerga*, including Kurdish president Barzani's son, and destroyed approximately five vehicles. Although MAJ Howard was among the wounded, struck by shrapnel in the leg, he refused to leave the battlefield.¹⁹

CPT Wright's half of ODA 391 arrived at the site of the blast within minutes. Sergeant Mike Ray, the only SF medic on scene, took control of the situation and began coordinating the treat-

Named for the town of Debecka slightly to the southeast, Debecka Crossroads is a four-way intersection where the roughly northeast-southwest road from Irbil to Al Qayyarah meets the northwest-southeast road from Kirkuk to Mosul.



ment and evacuation of the mass casualties. Although Wright had immediately called the other 391 split for assistance, they remained in heavy contact with the enemy and could not disengage. Approximately ten minutes later, after running several CAS missions against the crossroads, soldiers at Objective Rock again called forward to emphasize that they needed all available medics as soon as possible.²⁰

As the Iraqis began to hit the intermediate ridge with smoke, the ODAs realized that the enemy had ranged their positions and the teams decided to pull back to the second ridge, which was quickly dubbed “Press Ridge” in reference to the gathering media. The team medics, who had until then been manning Javelins, immediately began to assist with the casualty evacuation. Shortly thereafter, CPT Berg’s split of ODA 044 arrived from Objective Stone, and MAJ Hubbard’s B-Team from AOB 390 arrived with additional ammunition.²¹

By now, the Iraqis were reeling from the combined air-ground onslaught, and the second counterattack faltered badly. Several enemy soldiers actually appeared to be heading north with their hands clasped behind their heads, presumably to surrender, but an Iraqi sport utility vehicle approaching from the south stopped and its occupants started shooting the men. Although the incident took place at maximum effective range, the atrocity committed against fellow soldiers outraged the ODAs, who immediately engaged what they believed to be a Saddam Fedayeen vehicle.²²

More Iraqi trucks soon appeared and began to dismount troops a kilometer south of the crossroads for a third counterattack, which the ODAs disrupted with heavy machine guns. Although the teams discussed retaking the crossroads that evening, more CAS was on its way to hit the intersection and they did not want to risk another errant bomb in the falling darkness. MAJ Hubbard assumed tactical control of the FOB 33 detachments and directed them to establish a defensive perimeter near Objective Rock. ODA 391 set up on a hilltop to the west, ODA 392 bracketed the road with their vehicles, and ODA 374 (a recent arrival) established a blocking position along the bypass to Debecka.²³

By the end of the first day, SFC Sandoval’s force had driven the enemy from Zurqah Ziraw Dagh Ridge, repelled three successive armored counterattacks, and broken the critical line of communication at Debecka. The intense battle for the crossroads had itself lasted for two and a half hours, and when it was over, the small force of SF and *Peshmerga* fighters had destroyed five T-

55 tanks, three armored personnel carriers, eight cargo vehicles, and had neutralized ninety enemy troops.²⁴

The teams moved closer to the crossroads the next day, and remained on guard against continued counterattacks for another seventy-two hours. Although the SF teams observed Iraqi forces near the intersection and engaged them from their positions, they were not afforded an opportunity to physically clear the area. The ODAs also received sporadic mortar fire throughout the period, and in one memorable incident, Sergeant Major Joseph Ward responded to the fires by eliminating an Iraqi forward observer’s position with his own 60mm mortars.²⁵

In itself a triumph of courage and determination, the battle for Debecka Crossroads also served a larger strategic purpose. Besides safeguarding the city of Irbil and dealing a significant blow against conventional Iraqi forces, the victory facilitated future SF and *Peshmerga* advances toward Mahkmur and Al Qayyarah. Special Forces once again demonstrated its value as leadership and support for the *Peshmerga*, and the combined assault force proved its mettle. 🔴

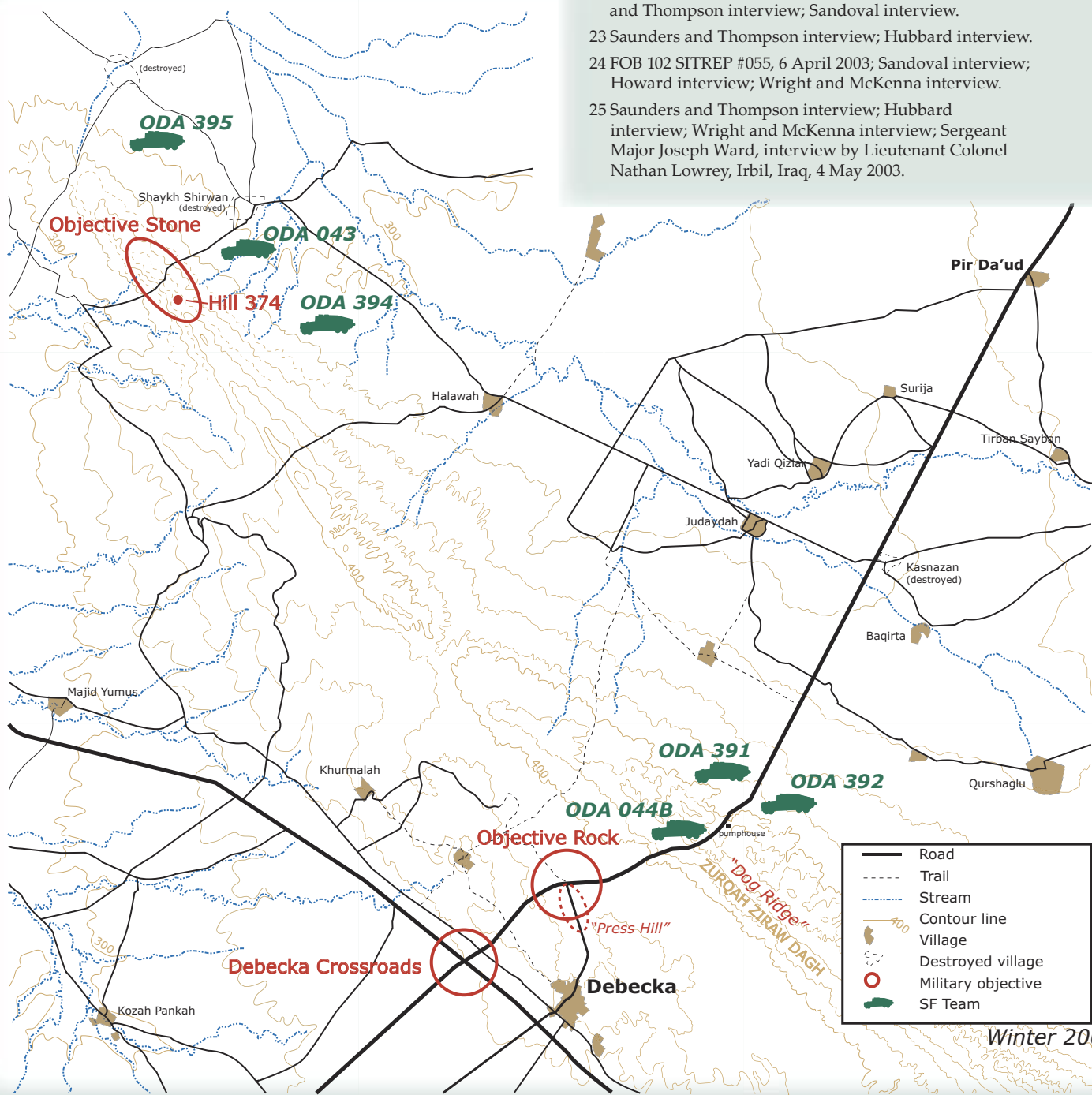
Nathan Lowrey is a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. He augmented the U.S. Special Operations Command History Office during the early days of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, deploying to northern Iraq with Joint Special Operation Task Force-North. He currently serves as the Executive Officer, Field Operations Branch, Marine Corps History and Museums Division.

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- 2 Beaudette interview; Waltemeyer interview; Sergeant Major Tim Strong, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Mosul, Iraq, 16 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL; Sergeant Major James Todd, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Mosul, Iraq, 14 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL.
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- 4 Sergeant First Class Tom Sandoval, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Mosul, Iraq, 16 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL.
- 5 Sandoval interview.
- 6 Sandoval interview; Captain Eric Wright and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Martin McKenna, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Irbil, Iraq, 27 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL; Major Eric Howard, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Mosul, Iraq, 16 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL.

- 7 Wright and McKenna interview; Sandoval interview; Captain Mathew Saunders and Master Sergeant Kenneth Thompson, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Irbil, Iraq, 27 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL; Howard interview; Major Curtis Hubbard, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Irbil, Iraq, 27 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL; Captain David Fowels, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Mosul, Iraq, 17 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL; Captain James Spivey and Master Sergeant Melvin Carrol, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Irbil, Iraq, 28 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL; Master Sergeant Benjamin Inderbitzen and Sergeant First Class Nathan Rehl, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Irbil, Iraq, 28 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL.
- 8 Saunders and Thompson interview; Sandoval interview; Howard interview; Major Eric Howard, personal communication with Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, 10 May 2003.
- 9 Spivey and Carrol interview; Inderbitzen and Rehl interview.
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- 11 Sandoval interview; Wright and McKenna interview; Saunders and Thompson interview.
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- 14 Sandoval interview.
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- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Howard interview; Saunders and Thompson interview; Sandoval interview; Wright and McKenna interview.
- 20 Wright and McKenna interview.
- 21 Wright and McKenna interview; Sandoval interview; Captain Robert Berg, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Mosul, Iraq, 16 April 2003, tape recording in USSOCOM Classified Files, MacDill AFB, FL; Hubbard interview.
- 22 Wright and McKenna interview; Saunders and Thompson interview; Sandoval interview.
- 23 Saunders and Thompson interview; Hubbard interview.
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- 25 Saunders and Thompson interview; Hubbard interview; Wright and McKenna interview; Sergeant Major Joseph Ward, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Lowrey, Irbil, Iraq, 4 May 2003.



ODA 542:

Working with the Free Iraqi Fighters



by A. Dwayne Aaron and Cherilyn A. Walley

The Defense Department championed the FIF, and saw them as a transitional force to be used in lieu of the police. The State Department, on the other hand, saw them as nothing more than the military arm of the Iraqi National Congress.

THE constant roar of aircraft taking off and landing at Kuwait's Ali Al-Salem Air Base was a constant reminder to Captain (CPT) Mike King (pseudonym) that he and his team were on the sidelines of the big show. Second Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) was sending teams on missions throughout southern Iraq, but CPT King and Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 542 had been left behind. They had been selected to serve as an Area Support Team (AST) and assist with the myriad details and precise coordination required by such a large-scale operation. King and the others took scant comfort in knowing that they were performing duties critical to the battalion's success. Between AST duties, the men of ODA 542 spent whatever time they could keeping their individual and team skills sharp for the day they, too, would be sent on a mission. Finally, on 10 April 2003, ODA 542 moved by MC-130 to Tallil Air Base, where they were detailed to train and work with members of the Free Iraqi Fighters (FIF).

In early April, Ahmed Chalabi, Chairman of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) Executive Council, and more than six hundred Iraqi volunteers had flown into An Nasiriyah to assist with the overthrow of the Saddam regime. Mostly Iraqi expatriates who fled the Saddam regime over the past decade, the FIF volunteers brought varying levels of military experience. The U.S. Defense Department championed

Chalabi and the FIF, and saw them as a transitional force to be used in lieu of the police. The State Department, on the other hand, saw the FIF as nothing more than the military arm of the INC. Whatever the disagreements in Washington DC, the FIF was on the ground and Central Command (CENTCOM) had to find a job for it to do.¹

The original plan was for ODA 542 to train and employ a platoon-sized element of FIF. However, within the first week, one hundred men arrived for training. Some of the local recruits were rumored to be Fedayeen, which led ODA 542 to take those individuals into custody and turn them over to the proper authorities for questioning. Once possible infiltrators were culled, the team set about organizing the trainees. The FIF reported en masse, with no apparent internal leadership organization. Master Sergeant (MSG) Theodore Ruggins (pseudonym), Staff Sergeant (SSG) Franco Findley (pseudonym), and SSG Steve Means acted as primary trainers, and organized the FIF into three platoons.² The SF trainers used basic small unit tactics drills and patrolling exercises to identify those FIF with natural leadership ability; these soldiers were then appointed as squad and platoon leaders. In the course of teaching the volunteers basic weapons proficiency, the team identified the best marksmen and designated them as machine gunners.³

As the tactical organization and assessment of the FIF's skills continued, ODA

542 also addressed such administrative and supply issues as identification documents, pay, food, and ammunition. Using a digital camera, the team made each FIF volunteer a photo identification card printed with an English transcription of the soldier's name. The paymaster arrived on 14 April to pay the troops—each volunteer receiving an impressive \$150 per month. Until the SF team could contract for local food, members of ODA 542 had to open the provided Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) and remove the culturally inappropriate items before distributing them to the FIF soldiers.⁴ The shortage of AK-47 ammunition was finally solved when team members ferreted out a local source.⁵

As the training progressed, both the SF and the FIF soldiers were restless and eager to get into the fight. On 16 April they were finally ordered to report to the Marine Task Force (TF) Tarawa in Al Kut, where the FIF would receive its first test by fire. After the Ba'ath party leaders had fled Al Kut, Sheik Said Ahmed, an Iranian sympathizer, claimed the mayoral position and began working to restore civil services. While members of ODA 542 conducted an assessment of Al Kut, they gathered some interesting information on Said Ahmed from conversations with local residents. Evidently, the Iranian government was funding the mayor, and he was using Iranian money to purchase food and other items for exclusive distribution to the Shia faithful. Said Ahmad was also reported to have stolen food from civic storage facilities and similarly distributed it under his name. The mayor was also responsible for posting anti-American and pro-Iranian posters throughout the city, and hiring people to conduct weekly protests at the Marine headquarters. The team passed all such intelligence on to Colonel (Col.) Ron Johnson, deputy commander of TF Tarawa, as well as the fact that Said Ahmed spent his off hours at the former Saddam Hospital.⁶ Col. Johnson acted on the information and gave Said Ahmed an ultimatum: stop the anti-American propaganda or get out of Al Kut.⁷

On the 25 April, Said Ahmed decided to heed the Marines' demands and leave town—but not without a fight. That afternoon, heavy firing broke out in Al Kut, warning the members of ODA 542 to either return to their safe house (which was located near the hospital), or hunker down with the Marines at Tarawa House. All afternoon and into the evening gunfire increased and spread, targeting task force compounds and drawing closer to the team's safe house and the hospital. In response, CPT King scrambled a forty-man FIF platoon and twelve American troops and rushed to secure the hospital. The team rolled into the hospital not a minute too soon, and FIF Colonel Ali Hasan and MSG Rug-gins hastily positioned the FIF soldiers in defensive perimeter. Within five minutes of their arrival, the AK-47 and machine gun fire directed at the hospital intensified. As fire came from all sides, it seemed that the insurgents were probing the perimeter to locate a weak spot; the perimeter held. As the battle continued into the night, the electricity went out. To keep the enemy at bay, SSG Cook called on a nearby Marine mortar unit to fire illumination rounds for the FIF.⁸ Meanwhile CPT King and the rest of the Americans cleared and secured the hospital itself.⁹ The firing continued sporadically for about three hours, then tapered off. Incoming casualties replaced rounds, and wounded insurgents eventually seemed to outnumber attackers.¹⁰

Back at the safe house, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Shoemaker and SSG Bob Flood shored up defenses with reinforcements from a nearby Marine unit and the remaining team members. At the same time the hospital came under attack, the safe house began receiving

Few of the FIF volunteers had previous military training or experience. 5th Special Forces Group ODA 542 organized the men into platoons and taught them the basics of soldiering.





By the time the FIF had been organized and trained, they were ready and anxious to join the fight against Saddam Hussein and others who wanted the new Iraq to fail.

automatic weapons fire from several directions. The fire did not appear to be directed at anything in particular and while the buildings received several hits, no team member was injured. The team members returned fire, but could not ascertain effectiveness. Ultimately, the attack ceased and the insurgents departed Al Kut.

The firefight at the hospital was the turning point for ODA 542 and the FIF in Al Kut.¹¹ Much to the delight of both the doctors and the patients, CPT King left a FIF security force in place to discourage looters. Over the next few days, word spread of the protection being provided and the number of people seeking medical care increased dramatically. Word of the role the FIF played in saving the hospital also spread throughout Al Kut, and soon other facilities and businesses in town asked for FIF security details. CPT King developed a list of key facilities and locations for the FIF to secure: hospitals, banks, the water treatment plant, and the propane filling station.¹²

With Said Ahmed and the Iranian influence gone, the anti-American protestors also disappeared. Once common, random firing was now rarely heard. During its first night on security detail, the FIF added to its reputation by thwarting two attempted robberies. The security presence encouraged people who feared for their safety to come out in public and return to their normal pursuits. CPT King said the transition was remarkable: "Almost overnight, it went from a ghost town to Times Square."¹³

Mission complete, on the morning of 15 May, ODA 542 and the FIF returned to Tallil Air Base; the team to take another assignment, and the FIF to demobilize. While a good idea, the FIF had outlived its usefulness, and resources needed to be allocated elsewhere. Five extra dollars were added to the volunteers' pay in order to facilitate their journeys home, and each was given a certificate of service. Allegations of corruption had certainly hastened their demobi-

lization, but they had also accomplished some good in Al Kut, and could be proud of their service.

As for the men of ODA 542, on 17 May, they loaded their vehicles one last time in Iraq, and headed south for the return journey to Ali Al-Salem Air Base in Kuwait. As the dust swirled behind their convoy and Al Kut disappeared in their rearview mirrors, the team felt both a sense of satisfaction and regret. They had helped thwart Iranian efforts to influence postwar politics in Al Kut, and had worked to restore a sense of security and normalcy for the general population. Those were accomplishments they could be proud of. Working with the Free Iraqi Fighters, however, brought mixed emotions. The training and supervision of the FIF had been both rewarding and frustrating, as the team struggled to turn a motley group of recruits with diverse motivations into a professional fighting force. ODA 542 could not complain too much, though—it had finally gotten its mission. ▲

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HACC Baghdad:

Civil Affairs in Action



by Landon Mavrelis

As chief of operations for the 354th Civil Affairs Brigade's Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center (HACC), Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Daniel L. Robey was the U.S. Army's middleman in Baghdad during the early months of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. He was the critical link between the Iraqi people, coalition forces, the international aid community, and the numerous U.S. government agencies tasked with rebuilding Iraq.¹ LTC Robey's mission was not a new one in the history of Army Civil Affairs, but its scale and scope did take the 354th into uncharted territory. The work was demanding, the pace relentless, and guidance often nonexistent; but, if the job was difficult, Robey's tireless diligence seemed equal to the challenge.

LTC Robey spoke to historians with boundless enthusiasm about the HACC's projects, which ranged from empowering local leaders to persuading an international organization to fix a broken sewer system. He ran the HACC from a simple cubicle in an unassuming building just down the street from one of Saddam Hussein's palaces. "It was literally a furniture warehouse," Robey explained matter-of-factly about the former republic guard facility that houses the center. A cluster of throne-like chairs and gilded sofas outside his makeshift office served as reminders of the building's recent use, and the unabashed decadence of its former occu-

pants. Robey's team, which arrived in Baghdad on 23 April 2003, worked quickly to transform the facility into an environment where the U.S. military, Iraqi nationals, and the international aid community could get down to the business of rebuilding the beleaguered capital.

The concept for the HACC did not exactly come with an instruction manual. Existing doctrine helped in part to define the 354th Brigade's mission by couching it in more familiar terms. The team decided early on that the HACC would function similarly to a civil military

operations center (CMOC) described in Field Manual 41-10, albeit on a much larger scale. "Think of it as baking a cake for six," said LTC Robey, "and now you're baking a cake for sixty." Operating as an oversized

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CMOC, the HACC would broker relationships between the international aid organizations and the Iraqi people. However, in a city of nearly six million, more than a central CMOC was needed. In order to increase access to Civil Affairs (CA) resources, battalions under the 354th CA Brigade, which were attached to maneuver units, began establishing satellite CMOCs in each of Baghdad's nine political districts. In less than two months, six of those facilities were operational.

Robey attributed the rapid rate of the HACC's success to the solid foundation laid by his predecessors. Three weeks before the 354th arrived in the Iraqi

capital, the 422nd CA Battalion was conducting daily meetings in Baghdad with international and nongovernmental organizations (IOs and NGOs). The battalion called its operation a Civil Military Assistance Center (CMAC), a term just as alien to CA doctrine as the HACC. Despite its unorthodox name, the 422nd CMAC established critical ties to the NGO and IO community in Baghdad. “Had [the 422nd] not done

Although the HACC was equipped to manage a heavy workload, Robey’s goal was to no longer be needed in Baghdad. “Our measure of success is putting ourselves out of business,” he joked. Robey was also keen on limiting reliance on the 354th because the brigade possessed neither the expertise nor the resources to undertake large-scale humanitarian projects on its own. The HACC’s job was to identify projects and make

sure those projects were handled by the appropriate agencies. Consequently, the HACC devoted much of its time to coordinating with humanitarian organizations that were better equipped to identify the needs of the Iraqi people.

Despite the official end of active combat in Iraq on 1 May 2003, many in the international aid community were still hesitant to enter Baghdad because of safety concerns. In response, Robey’s team implemented an “Adopt a Neighborhood” program that attempted to lure NGOs into less permissive areas of the capital. During fifteen-minute presentations at the HACC, soldiers from the battalion CMOCs provided aid workers with a “virtual” tour of a Baghdad neighborhood, using digital photos, character sketches of local leaders, and three to five featured



Officers in the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center (HACC) regularly met with nongovernmental and international organizations in order to maximize cooperation between the multitude of agencies and programs trying to rebuild Baghdad.

such good work to start with,” remarked Robey, “we would have been way behind the power curve.”

The HACC team also hedged its bets by taking notes on the Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) in Kuwait City. They shadowed the Kuwaiti-run HOC for three days, gleaning pointers on daily operations. The experience provided the team with a working model for operations and a valuable contact in LTC Stuart Gordon, who later relocated to Baghdad to help establish another HOC known as the Iraqi Assistance Center. Running at full speed, the HACC officially completed 116 missions in just over a month and a half.

projects. The program was simple by design, and worked by introducing the human dimension into otherwise mundane repair and construction jobs.

Robey and his team also tried to “deconflict” all humanitarian agency meetings in the city in order to maximize the IO and NGO presence. “We [were] all trying to figure out... the best use of our assets,” said Robey of the humanitarian aid mission, “because we [were] all on the same team; we [were] all in this together.” As proof of his commitment to that philosophy, Robey rescheduled NGO meetings held on Tuesdays at the HACC when he learned the United Nations was

During fifteen-minute presentations at the HACC, soldiers from the battalion CMOCs provided aid workers with a “virtual” tour of a Baghdad neighborhood, using digital photos, character sketches of local leaders, and three to five featured projects.

holding its meetings during the same time slot. He also advertised meetings for the NGO Coordination Center in Iraq, a group that was opposed to military involvement. “Our mission [was] to support humanitarian assistance in Baghdad,” says Robey. “If that [meant] supporting an NGO that [snubbed] us then [we’d] do it.”

When the HACC was not meeting with international agencies, Robey was busy enlisting the help of maneuver commanders in the CA mission. Meetings with infantry commanders yielded important leads on local leaders who were eager to participate in the rebuilding process. When the commander of the 3rd Infantry Division’s 4/64th Armored Regiment thought he recognized a unifying political force in a man known as Mr. Mustafa, he told the HACC. Robey then contacted the Office of Coalition Provisional Authority (OCPA), the civilian agency charged with rebuilding Iraq, and within a week Mr. Mustafa was meeting with OCPA officials to discuss rehabilitating his neighborhood. Starting a dialogue with community leaders was key, because doing so accelerated the return of power to the residents of Baghdad.

During its short time in the Iraqi capital, the HACC noticed a decline in its daily business. Following Robey’s business model, this was a positive trend. Larger humanitarian agencies such as U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) stepped in with money to award contracts for rehabilitation projects. As the HACC moved toward transitioning out of Baghdad, it compiled information on local business people in hopes that some would receive contracts. Although the HACC’s role in Baghdad continued to wane, Robey and his team watched for issues that no one else had tackled. “These groups [of Iraqis] come in and if we simply turn them away ... we lose affirmative contact

with them forever,” predicted Robey. This ability to realize the effects of small actions on the big picture was the source of the HACC’s success amid the complex civil-military relationships of postwar Baghdad. ▲

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The ability to realize the effects of small actions on the big picture was the source of the HACC’s success amid the complex civil-military relationships of postwar Baghdad.

Mass Graves

by Patrick Jennings

THE tragic events of 9/11 swirled around many of us, but for U.S. Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Edward Burley the attack was on his hometown of Washington DC. Looking out from his office, Burley watched the smoke rise from the Pentagon and knew his life, like many others, was about to change. What he did not know on that day was that his role in the Global War on Terrorism would require not only his strengths as a citizen soldier, but his unique civilian experience as well.¹

Burley's civilian work as a United States Prosecuting Attorney gave him a strong background in murder investigations and forensic science. In the days following major combat activity in Iraq, Burley and his team began the tragic process of identifying the dead in the mass graves left by Saddam Hussein's terrible regime.

Attached to the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, Burley coordinated the efforts of a civilian team of British and Australian anthropologists specially trained in the excavation and evaluation of mass graves. Known as the Institute for Forensic Excellence and Investigation of Genocide, this team worked under the control of the Office of Human Rights. This organization went well beyond the basics of exhuming graves and became heavily involved in researching lists compiled by local citizens that identified potential victims of assassination. The scope of the work was staggering. In Bosnia the estimated number of people buried in mass graves is 30,000, and after nine years only some 9,000 have been located.² In Iraq, the lowest estimate is 290,000, and the highest estimate runs close to 3 million victims of the regime buried in mass graves. The team of anthropologists primarily focused on identifying bodies and gathering evidence for possible criminal prosecution of the perpetrators for war crimes or international crimes against humanity.

Burley and his team had to work with a complex set of cultural and religious rules. Despite the age of many of the sites, Burley's team made sure that any body exhumed during the day was reburied by nightfall in accordance with the Islamic faith. Women, even British technicians, were careful to keep their heads covered while working on the various sites. Grieving



PHOTO CREDIT: 126th Military History Detachment

LTC Edward Burley coordinated a team of British and Australian anthropologists tasked with finding, exhuming, and documenting mass graves in Iraq. Sites like this one near Al-Hillah have been found all over the country.

survivors were allowed access to the sites in order to mourn for the missing. Clerics and religious leaders were continuously consulted to ensure every aspect of cultural and religious respect was followed, all while the team continued its grim investigation.

Burley and the team of investigators also confronted civil-military issues. Despite their strong relationship with U.S. military commanders in areas they covered, some higher command and national-level military and civilian leaders were uncomfortable with the mass graves mission and just who should be directing its efforts. Tensions eased when the mandate of the British/Australian forensic team came to an end, and LTC Burley passed control of the mass graves investigation to a civilian office in the newly formed Coalition Provisional Authority. The team had made a good start to the investigation, but much more remained to be done, and it would be carried out by Iraqis seeking justice for their own nation. It was a role that United States Prosecuting Attorney Edward Burley knew well. ♠

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Flash to Bang Time— Twenty-two Hours:

The 2nd Ranger Battalion's Assault on the Rawah Terrorist Camp

by James Schroder



ON the evening of 11 June 2003, the Rangers from B Company, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, attacked and killed over seventy Islamic terrorists at a training camp in the vicinity of Rawah, Iraq, thirty miles east of the Syrian border. During a coordinated assault on Objective Reindeer, two Ranger platoons and a company and battalion command element infiltrated via four MH-60K Black Hawks and two MH-47E Chinooks from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), and attacked the camp from the east. A third platoon, with a battalion mortar team, traversed 175 miles overland and arrived simultaneously with the other two platoons, established blocking positions and a mortar position. Additional 160th SOAR assets, AH-6 attack helicopters, provided close air support during the operation. The Rangers' orders were clear: Destroy all terrorists in the vicinity of the camp in order to prevent attacks against coalition forces—an excellent mission for Army Rangers.

The previous night at 2200 hours, Major (MAJ) John McGinnis (pseudonym), the operations officer and acting commander of Ranger elements in Iraq, and Captain (CPT) Mark Everett (pseudonym), assistant operations officer, received a warning order to begin planning for a combat mission against the terrorist camp. The 101st Airborne Division had been planning the operation for several days, but V Corps

received new information that suggested that an attack from the terrorist camp was imminent. Even so, the Screaming Eagles needed several more days to execute the mission. Therefore, V Corps solicited a proposal from the 75th Ranger Regiment, which gave the mission to the 2nd Ranger Battalion. McGinnis and Everett, in conjunction with B Company commander CPT Hunter (pseudonym), developed a concept of the operation that same night. The collaborative planning process—including the company commander to develop the overall scheme—greatly shortened the amount of time that it took to complete troop leading procedures.² Hunter devised a simple scheme of maneuver to ensure that no terrorists escaped, and that concentrated fires on the objective would achieve their purpose. Within several hours, McGinnis sent the plan back through command channels to V Corps, indicating that the Rangers could strike within twenty-four hours. Even so, McGinnis thought that the 101st would retain the mission.³

Objective Reindeer was a wadi, 500 feet long and 60 to 150 feet wide, with steep rocky sides 35 feet deep, and two smaller wadis channeling into the main creek bed. Reindeer actually consisted of three separate objectives: Dasher, Rudolf, and Comet. On 11 June at 0900, CPT Hunter issued the operations order to his platoon leaders: 1st platoon would insert via heli-

On 27 July 2004 Vice President Richard B. Cheney stated that the terrorist threat did not represent a “foe we can reason with or negotiate with or appease. This is, to put it simply, an enemy that we must vanquish.”

copters, then isolate and clear Objectives Dasher and Rudolf; next, 2nd platoon would insert by helicopters, isolate, and clear Objective Comet; 3rd platoon would simultaneously arrive overland in vehicles and establish blocking positions west of the objective to prevent any escapees. Minutes later, MAJ McGinnis informed Hunter that it looked like the mission would not take place; so, Hunter used the opportunity to run his platoon leaders through a planning exercise. By 1100, however, McGinnis informed him that the mission was to be executed that night, after all. Platoon leaders briefed their platoons, Hunter and his fire support officer finalized plans with the 160th SOAR planners, and the final air mission briefing and rehearsal drills were completed by 1700.⁴

The ground assault force (GAF) departed from Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) at 1545, negotiating several damaged bridges as it moved along Highway 12 running from Fallujah through Ar Ramadi and Hit to a junction south of Rawah. Along the way, the GAF linked up with two M3 Bradley platoons from the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in the vicinity of Hadithah, and established a forward arming and refueling point (FARP) near the highway south of Rawah. After quickly refueling at the FARP, the GAF awaited the signal to begin movement to the objective: the commencement of preassault fires. At the signal, the GAF proceeded to the objective, while the Bradley platoons secured the FARP and stood ready to reinforce the GAF, if needed.

The helicopter assault force (HAF) departed BIAP and flew to

The assault on Objective Reindeer took the Rangers and 160th SOAR personnel far into the deserts of western Iraq. SOAR support was instrumental in the dismantling of the Rawah Terrorist Training Camp.



Al Asad Airfield for refueling, arriving at 2030. After refueling, an MH-60K Black Hawk failed to start minutes before the scheduled departure time. The crewmembers escorted key leaders to another Black Hawk in accordance with the bump plan—a contingency plan to crossload key individuals or groups in the event of an aircraft breakdown—which left one Ranger squad at the airfield. The HAF departed two and a half minutes late, but arrived on time for H-hour: 2200. Sequencing into target, the first pair of AH-6 gunships suppressed surviving enemy fighters on Objective Dasher after six Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) had exploded in an airburst over the site, and an AC-130 Specter Gunship had raked the area with munitions.

First Lieutenant (1LT) Peter Korenek (pseudonym) and his 1st Platoon Rangers peered out the open cargo doors of the lead MH-60K (“Kilo”) Black Hawk and saw fires burning in the vicinity of helicopter landing zone (HLZ) Sparrow. Once the Black Hawk touched down, the Rangers raced into the dusty darkness as a pair of AH-6 Little Bird gunships strafed an enemy position with minigun rounds and rockets. Enemy fighters shot wildly at the helicopters with rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), and one AH-6 sustained a hit to the nose bubble, but the rocket did not detonate.

Landing several hundred meters short of the HLZ because of a Little Bird gun run, Staff Sergeant (SSG) Mitchell Burn (pseudonym) oriented his squad toward Objective Dasher and ran across the pancake desert with Korenek. The squad reached the draw as an MH-47E (“Echo”) Chinook touched down with the remainder of 1st Platoon. South of Korenek’s position, a second Black Hawk landed at HLZ Wren. SSG Alan White (pseudonym) disembarked with his squad and seized the high ground near the gulch overlooking Objective Rudolf within ninety seconds.

Second Platoon inserted via a Kilo and an Echo into HLZs Napier and Emu, respectively. Sergeant (SGT) Roger Mueller (pseudonym) and his team disembarked

the Chinook first, followed by the company command element, and oriented on Objective Comet. Mueller and the weapons squad established a blocking position and prepared to clear through Comet. Company First Sergeant (1SG) Philip Roemer (pseudonym) was the last off the Chinook. He, senior medic SGT Brad Gillis (pseudonym), and the radio operator, moved toward the smaller east-west wadi leading to Objective Dasher to establish a casualty collection point (CCP). As they moved, two terrorists fired on them from the prone position, shooting the radioman's rucksack strap off his right shoulder. He and Gillian immediately shot and killed the fighters in the ditch near their CCP, registering the first kills in the fight. The remainder of 2nd Platoon moved from HLZ Napier into blocking positions, focusing on the wadi from the north and killing three fighters along the way with grenades and rifles.⁵

Meanwhile, the GAF arrived and successfully established blocking positions and a mortar position, but not without drama. One vehicle drove into a wash and had to be extracted. The mortar team switched vehicles were set up within ten minutes. The company executive officer, 1LT Nielson (pseudonym) radioed CPT Hunter with an update about 3rd Platoon's situation, and then moved closer to Objective Reindeer, well protected by the higher ground on the western side of the wadi. All fires were oriented down into the wadi from both the east and west sides, reducing the potential for fratricide. Soon, the mortar team executed several fire missions in support of 1st Platoon along with the AH-6 Little Bird gunships.⁶

SSG Burn and his squad moved into the gulch on the platoon's right flank, locating a large weapons cache of two thousand RPGs, fifty RPK machine guns, eighty-seven SA-7 surface-to-air-missiles, and countless other types of munitions. He marked the cache for destruction and pressed forward. The squad comprising the platoon's main effort, led by SSG Roger Duncan (pseudonym), cleared the



1st and 2nd Platoons assaulted Objectives Comet, Dasher, and Rudolf in the wadi that comprised Objective Reindeer. Staff Sergeant Burn and his squad from 1st Platoon located a large weapons cache in the smaller wadi to the north of Objective Dasher.

high ground south of Objective Dasher, killing five combatants, and then moved into the wadi. SSG Bradley Talbert (pseudonym) and his squad secured the platoon's left flank, and engaged the enemy from the high ground overlooking Objective Rudolf.⁷

1LT Korenek and Sergeant First Class (SFC) Clint Anderson (pseudonym), the platoon sergeant for 2nd Platoon, coordinated their clearance into the wadi. SSG Duncan maneuvered his squad down the wadi and found twelve terrorists attempting to reorganize, and killed them all with direct fire. While maneuvering his platoon, Korenek received fire below the cliff, and dropped a fragmentation grenade in response. The grenade failed to stop the firing, so he climbed down the ledge to a point where he could get a clear shot on the enemy, killing them both. A burning vehicle in the center of the wadi prevented SSG Burn and his squad from providing adequate overwatch, so they continued to observe and fire at movement across the wadi to the west.⁸

As 2nd squad pushed south into the wadi, backlit by the burning truck, SGT Mark Walters (pseudonym), the lead team leader, spotted an RPG team and shouted, "RPG!" As he fired his M4 carbine,

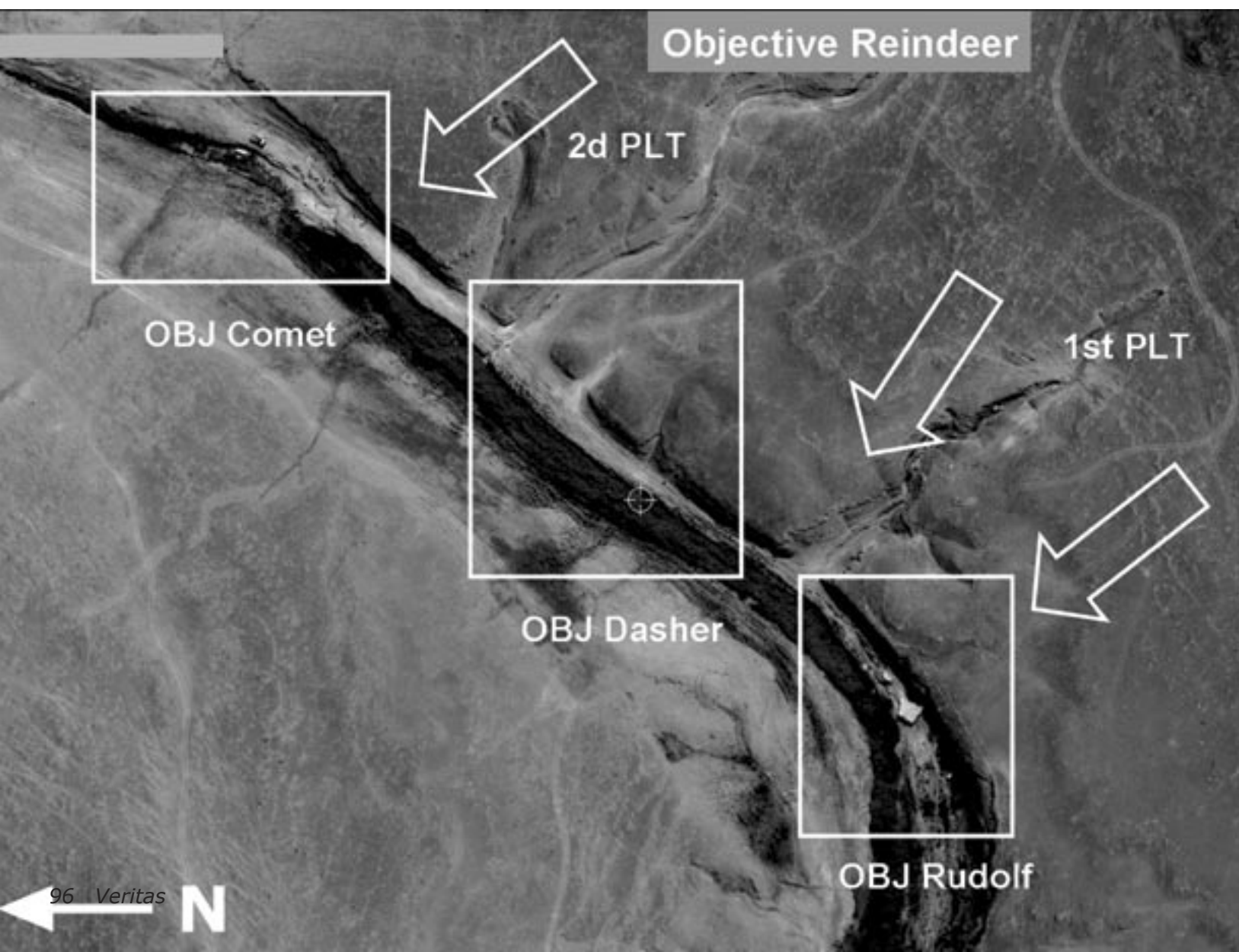
In spite of his missing leg and shrapnel injuries to his left elbow, calf, and left thumb, Walters emptied a magazine into the grenade position, killing the gunner, all while shouting fire commands to his fellow Rangers.

the enemy fired an RPG round that blew his leg off below the knee. In spite of his missing leg and shrapnel injuries to his left elbow, calf, and left thumb, Walters emptied a magazine into the grenade position, killing the gunner, all while shouting fire commands to his fellow Rangers. Platoon medic Specialist Gomez stabilized Walters, expertly treating his wounds under heavy fire. After Gomez stabilized and packaged Walters for travel, SFC Oscar Weimer (pseudonym) directed several Rangers to move Walters on a "Skedco" (Sked brand rescue sled) to HLZ Sparrow for evacuation. En route, they met 1SG Roemer and SGT Gillis also making their way to the HLZ. Weimer handed Walters' equipment to the 1SG for accountability, and returned to the fight.

Once Walters was prepared to move, the battalion tactical air controller called in the CASEVAC (casualty evacuation) helicopter that was air loitering nearby, allowing CPT Hunter to focus on the ongoing fight. The helicopter landed within thirty seconds, and Walters was passed into the care of the on board surgeon for the trip to Al Asad, where a medical airplane awaited.⁹

Meanwhile, SSG Duncan pinpointed another fleeing RPG gunner with his infrared laser, enabling his squad and SSG Bradley Talbert's (pseudonym) squad to target and kill the gunner with their M240 machine guns. SSG Burn saw other enemy fighters run into the tall grass, and Korenek decided to clear the grass by fire with M240s and squad automatic

1st and 2nd Platoons of B Company, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment infiltrated by helicopter, and 3rd Platoon's ground assault force established blocking positions west of Objective Reindeer. The helicopter landing zones were arrayed in a semicircle southeast of the objective to block any attempts by terrorists to escape the free fire area.



weapons. The Rangers attempted to burn out the vegetation with incendiary grenades, flares, and burning debris, but the grass was too damp. At this point, their platoon declared their sector clear and the 1st Platoon Rangers began exploitation of the area.¹⁰

Second Platoon moved on line through Objective Comet, with SGT Mueller's squad clearing the west side of the wadi, and SSG Weimer's team clearing the east side by fire. Mueller identified two fighters moving out of the grass area below a ledge nearly two feet away from SFC Anderson. As he engaged the enemy with direct fire just feet away from his platoon sergeant, Mueller yelled out to identify himself to Anderson. Identifying the threat, Anderson threw several hand grenades into the terrorists' position, killing them. The platoon continued toward the burning vehicles in the center of the wadi, methodically engaging terrorists, but ever cognizant of 1st Platoon clearing from the south.¹¹

After approximately forty minutes, the two platoons linked up. Initial reports indicated fifteen terrorists killed, but once the follow-on exploitation began, that number quickly increased to seventy. What the Rangers thought was burning debris and sandbags were, in fact, body parts scattered throughout Objective Rudolf. CPT Hunter and MAJ McGinnis were confident that the objective was now clear, and ordered his 1st and 2nd Platoons to prepare for egress. The Night Stalkers arrived at 0400 and extracted the Rangers from their infiltration points. The HAF departed back to BIAP, while 3rd Platoon remained to conduct a sensitive site exploitation of the area in daylight.¹²

The mid-June Army Special Operations Forces raid on the Rawah Terrorist Camp thwarted at least one future attack on coalition forces in Iraq. As is often the case, many factors contributed to the success of the mission. Several Rangers and Night Stalkers commented that the operation played out just like a multilateral training exercise, and that "everything went like clock work." The force's previous combat experience had also refined the regiments' planning processes, enabling them to execute within hours of receiving a mission. Finally, the highly skilled force proved the effectiveness of such basic principles as keeping the plan simple and striking the enemy with violence of action. ↑

Endnotes

- 1 Jim Garamone, "Cheney Calls Terrorists 'Enemy We Must Vanquish,'" *American Forces Press Service*, 27 July 2004, http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2004/n07272004_2004072709.html.
- 2 Major John McGinnis (pseudonym), 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, email to Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones, Jr., 18 November 2004, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Captain Mark Everett (pseudonym), 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 October 2003, Fort Lewis, WA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 4 First Lieutenant Paul Korenek (pseudonym), 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 October 2003, Fort Lewis, WA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; First Sergeant Philip Roemer (pseudonym), 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 October 2003, Fort Lewis, WA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 Roemer interview; Sergeant Roger Mueller (pseudonym), 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 October 2003, Fort Lewis, WA, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 Everett interview.
- 7 "Objective Reindeer Debrief, 13 June 2003," USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 Korenek interview.
- 9 Roemer interview; McGinnis comments.
- 10 "Objective Reindeer Debrief."
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Korenek interview.

Several Rangers and Night Stalkers commented that the operation played out just like a multilateral training exercise, and that "everything went like clock work."



Snap Shot

by Earl J. Moniz

High resolution images can always be copied and reduced for email, web, and presentation use, but low resolution images can never regain the detail sacrificed for convenience—those pixels are permanently lost.

FROM J. Schulze's 1727 discovery of the first light-sensitive chemical compound through the advent of glass negatives and all the way to the present-day popularity of digital imagery, change has been the only constant in the world of photography. Since the Civil War, the U.S. military has relied on photographs for intelligence gathering, instruction, and historic preservation. While Civil War photographers relied on bulky large format cameras, modern Army units deploy with lighter and smaller digital cameras. Personal cameras have also become ubiquitous in the field, meaning any given soldier may be designated the unit's "official" photographer. When used correctly, digital cameras are invaluable in preserving memories and recording history; when used incorrectly, however, they become little more than mini-photo albums full of pixelated versions of reality.

In spite of all the advantages digital imagery has to offer, one fundamental photography truth remains: quality is imperative. Accompanying this article is a 1916 image of a unit of the North Carolina National Guard deployed near El Paso, Texas. It is a panoramic photograph about ten inches tall and forty inches wide. The char-



acteristics of plate photography allowed an impressive amount of detail to be recorded in a relatively simple process. By looking closely at even an aged print, the eye can pick out a baseball game taking place amidst the cactus and tumbleweed. Unfortunately, unless care is taken to adjust digital camera settings correctly, such delightful, and perhaps historically significant, detail is lost forever.

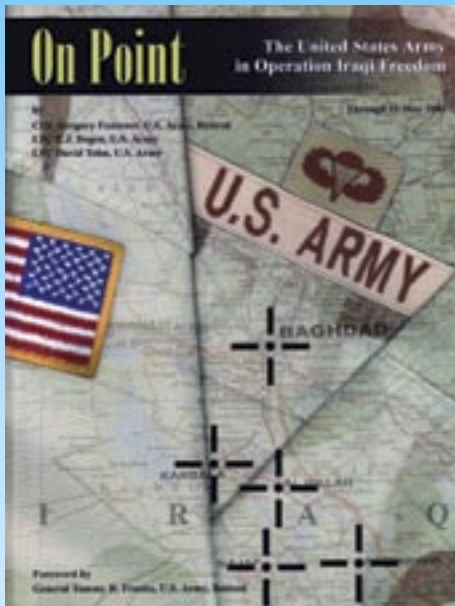
Field photography is often intended to serve a narrow purpose for a specific period of time, and all too often image quality reflects this shortsighted perspective. Taking the long view, images significant enough to be of importance in an operation or exercise are also important as a historical record of those events. Unfortunately, the short-term purpose of the images usually determines the final product. While higher image resolution produces better photographs, it also requires larger file sizes than can be easily transmitted over communications lines.

As usual, the best solution to this field photography conundrum is a compromise. When the mission demands easily transmitted images, soldiers may opt for low resolution settings on their digital

cameras. However, when storage space allows, high resolution images should be recorded whenever possible. Copies of these detailed images can always be reduced for transmission, but low resolution images can never regain the detail sacrificed for convenience—those pixels are permanently lost to history.

Our imagery recommendation: in situations concerning historically significant, once-in-a-lifetime events, always use the highest resolution possible and collect as many pixels as feasible. That single technique will enable future historians and researchers to reassemble the event as accurately as possible. And who knows? Maybe one day you too, will be memorialized playing baseball in the tumbleweeds. 🏆

Earl J. Moniz has been a digital information specialist with the USASOC History Office since 2001. After retiring as a Special Forces noncommissioned officer, he earned his M.L.S. from North Carolina Central University. Current projects include the USASOC History Office Kiosk Program, digital imagery for USASOC History publications, and the cataloguing and organization of History Office imagery.



The Book Drop

Reviewed by J. Kirk Burton,
USAJFKSWCS IG

On Point *The United States Army in* *Operation IRAQI FREEDOM*

by COL Gregory Fontenot, LTC E.J.
Degen, and LTC David Tohn

IN April 2003, Army Chief of Staff General Eric K. Shinseki commissioned an effort to capture the history of the Army in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. *On Point* is the result of CSA's desire to review the "Army's performance, assess the role it played in the joint and coalition team," and quickly capture "the strategic, operational, and tactical lessons that should be disseminated and applied to future fights."

The first two chapters of *On Point* set the stage by describing the evolution of the U.S. Army from the cold war force that entered Iraq in 1991 to the force that rolled into Baghdad in April 2003. The reader is provided insights into key decisions and direction by Army leaders who possessed a vision and understanding of the need to change not only tactics, but the way we train and organize our units, integrate them into the joint force, and communicate information at every level, from squad leader to corps commander.

Chapters three through six take the reader through major Army combat operations, from the crossing of the berm through the fall of Baghdad and the collapse of the Iraqi regime. The integration of mission graphics, pictures, and vignettes gives the reader a good understanding of the complex and fluid nature of modern warfare. There was no attempt to cover failures where they came up, although the focus was clearly on the success of the operation.

The final chapters provide the authors' thoughts on the implications of OIF for an Army in transition, and where it may lead future efforts at transformation for the armed forces. While there are the occasional vignettes of SOF and its impact on operations either through com-

bat actions or by providing information, the references are largely vague and broad. The authors identified the integration of SOF with conventional forces as both a major contributing factor to the success of OIF and as an area worthy of significant future study and effort. They admitted that the inability to provide authoritative proof of SOF contributions is largely a result of the continued classification level of these operations.

The book would have benefited from the inclusion of a timeline of major events and actions perhaps even starting from 9/11. Rather than following a normal chronological presentation of the battle, the authors chose to group the operations and engagements by purpose rather than time. I found this style difficult to follow, especially in describing the drive toward Baghdad, with my mind having to reset and fight the actions forward toward Baghdad over and over again and in the process, losing a picture of how the actions fit together.

On Point tells the beginning of a story whose end is still years away. It captures sweeping strategic moves and decisions of senior commanders as well as the tactical level stories of individual soldiers and units. The accounts provide a vivid picture of leaders making bold decisions in the uncertain and chaotic fog of battle and then dealing with the consequences, good or bad. It also makes clear that the strength of the U.S. Army in the fight in Iraq comes from the skill, intelligence, determination and guts of the American soldier.

Gregory Fontenot, E.J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS, Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004).

The Azimuth of the USASOC History Office

JUST as the “phoenix rose from its ashes” *Veritas*, the title of the popular Vietnam-era special warfare magazine, is chosen for the *Journal of Army Special Operations History*. It will be published quarterly by the USASOC History Office to support the ongoing command effort to record and publish Army special operations history. Special editions like this one on ARSOF in Iraq will focus on current operations campaigns. Spectrum issues will include all elements of special operations forces from World War II to the present as well as introduce readers to forthcoming USASOC-sponsored books.

Veritas (truth) like the USASOC history books will be a professional publication that must stand the “test of time”. It is not a public affairs magazine. Hence, every effort will be made to ensure that the contents are accurate, well-documented, and interesting. The *Veritas* focus is the Army SOF community. The goal is to recount ARSOF history based on all levels—from the commanders’ to the soldiers’ perspectives.

The first major publication of the USASOC History Office covering the

Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) was *Weapon of Choice: ARSOF in Afghanistan* published in July 2004. The Army special operations role in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) will be addressed in *All Roads Lead to Baghdad: ARSOF in Iraq* due for publication summer 2005. Other funded USASOC History book projects are the history of SOSCOM, ARSOF in Korea, 1950-1954, ARSOF in El Salvador, ARSOF in Somalia, and the History of Camp Mackall.

Suggestions to improve the journal and comments on the articles are solicited. ARSOF history is living history. The USASOC History Office welcomes articles on ARSOF history for publication from all interested researchers. Submission information can be found inside the front cover of the magazine.

The contents are not necessarily the official views of, nor endorsed by, the U.S. government, Department of Defense, USSOCOM, or USASOC. The contents are compiled, edited, and prepared by the USASOC History Office. All photos not credited are courtesy of the ARSOF Archives.

